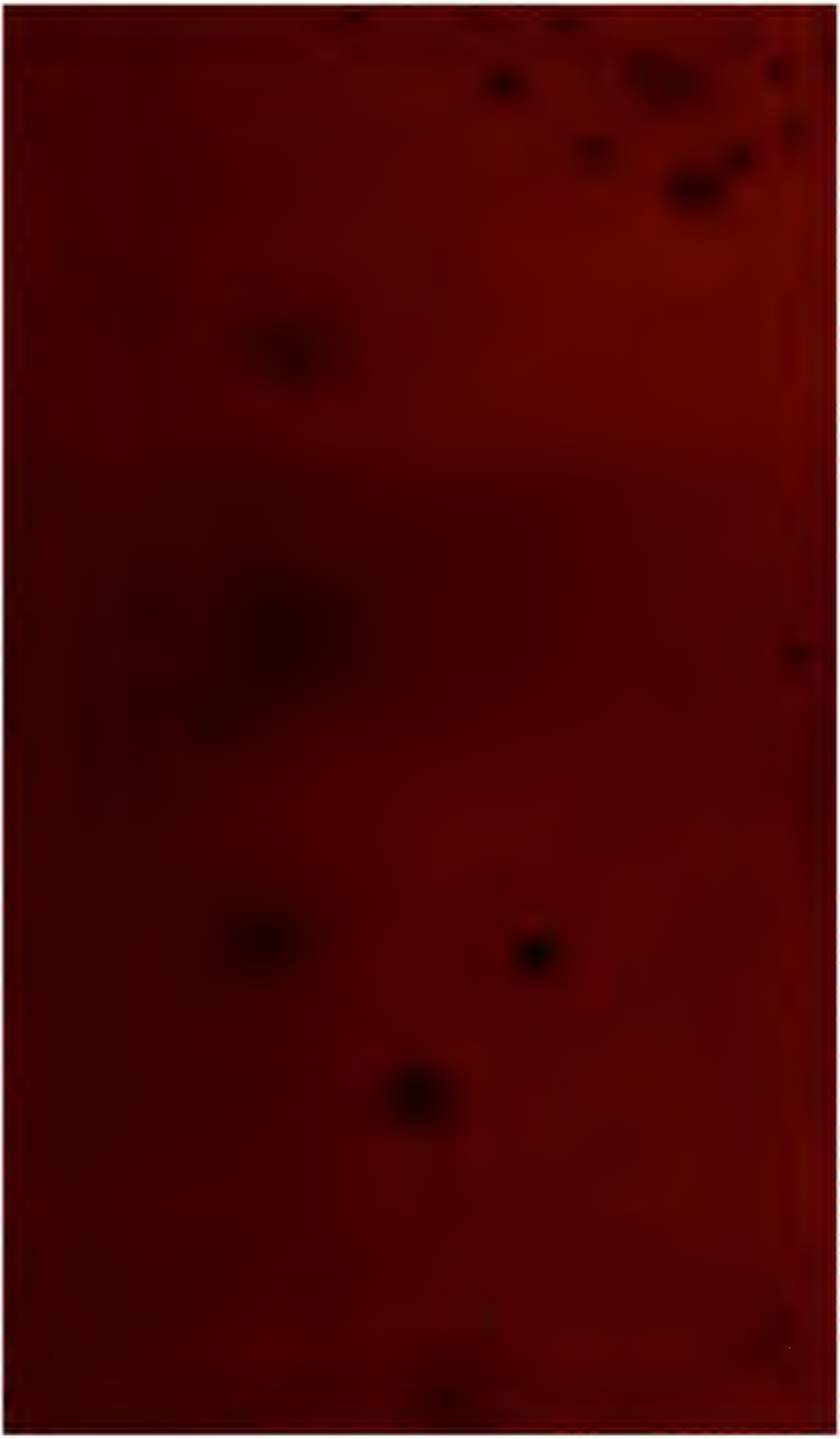

FELIX HOLT

" Upon the midlands now the industrious muse doth fall,
The shires which we the heart of England well may call.

My native country thou, which so brave spirits hast bred,
If there be virtues yet remaining in thy earth,
Or any good of thine thou bred'st into my birth,
Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of thee,
Of all thy later brood the unworthiest though I be."

DRAYTON : *Polyolbion.*

FELIX HOLT

THE RADICAL

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

AUTHOR OF 'ADAM BEDE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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FELIX HOLT,

THE RADICAL.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The fields are hoary with December's frost.
I too am hoary with the chills of age.
But through the fields and through the untrodden woods
Is rest and stillness—only in my heart
The pall of winter shrouds a throbbing life.

A WEEK after that Treby Riot, Harold Transome was at Transome Court. He had returned from a hasty visit to town, to keep his Christmas at this delightful country home, not in the best Christmas spirits. He had lost the election; but if that had been his only annoyance, he had good humour and good sense enough to have borne it as well as most men, and to have paid the eight or nine thousand,

which had been the price of ascertaining that he was not to sit in the next Parliament, without useless grumbling. But the disappointments of life can never, any more than its pleasures, be estimated singly; and the healthiest and most agreeable of men is exposed to that coincidence of various vexations, each heightening the effect of the other, which may produce in him something corresponding to the spontaneous and externally unaccountable moodiness of the morbid and disagreeable.

Harold might not have grieved much at a small riot in Treby, even if it had caused some expenses to fall on the county; but the turn which the riot had actually taken, was a bitter morsel for rumination, on more grounds than one. However the disturbances had arisen and been aggravated—and probably no one knew the whole truth on these points—the conspicuous, gravest incidents had all tended to throw the blame on the Radical party, that is to say, on Transome and on Transome's agents; and so far the candidateship and its results had done Harold dishonour in the county: precisely the opposite effect to that which was a dear object of his ambition. More than this, Harold's conscience was active enough to be very unpleasantly affected by what had befallen Felix Holt. His memory, always

good, was particularly vivid in its retention of Felix Holt's complaint to him about the treating of the Sproxton men, and of the subsequent irritating scene in Jermyn's office, when the personage with the inauspicious name of Johnson had expounded to him the impossibility of revising an electioneering scheme once begun, and of turning your vehicle back when it had already begun to roll downhill. Remembering Felix Holt's words of indignant warning about hiring men with drink in them to make a noise, Harold could not resist the urgent impression that the offences for which Felix was committed were fatalities, not brought about by any willing co-operation of his with the rioters, but arising probably from some ill-judged efforts to counteract their violence. And this impression, which insisted on growing into a conviction, became in one of its phases an uneasy sense that he held evidence which would at once tend to exonerate Felix, and to place himself and his agents in anything but a desirable light. It was likely that some one else could give equivalent evidence in favour of Felix—the little talkative Dissenting preacher, for example ; but, anyhow, the affair with the Sproxton men would be ripped open and made the worst of by the opposite parties. The man who has failed in the use of

some indirectness, is helped very little by the fact that his rivals are men to whom that indirectness is a something human, very far from being alien. There remains this grand distinction, that he has failed, and that the jet of light is thrown entirely on his misdoings.

In this matter Harold felt himself a victim. Could he hinder the tricks of his agents? In this particular case he had tried to hinder them, and had tried in vain. He had not loved the two agents in question, to begin with; and now at this later stage of events he was more innocent than ever of bearing them anything but the most sincere ill-will. He was more utterly exasperated with them than he would probably have been if his one great passion had been for public virtue. Jermyn, with his John Johnson, had added this ugly dirty business of the Treby election to all the long-accumulating list of offences, which Harold was resolved to visit on him to the utmost. He had seen some handbills carrying the insinuation that there was a discreditable indebtedness to Jermyn on the part of the Transomes. If any such notions existed apart from electioneering slander, there was all the more reason for letting the world see Jermyn severely punished for abusing his power over the family affairs, and

tampering with the family property. And the world certainly should see this with as little delay as possible. The cool confident assuming fellow should be bled to the last drop in compensation, and all connection with him be finally got rid of. Now that the election was done with, Harold meant to devote himself to private affairs, till everything lay in complete order under his own supervision.

This morning he was seated as usual in his private room, which had now been handsomely fitted up for him. It was but the third morning after the first Christmas he had spent in his English home for fifteen years, and the home looked like an eminently desirable one. The white frost lay on the broad lawn, on the many-formed leaves of the evergreens, and on the giant trees at a distance. Logs of dry oak blazed on the hearth; the carpet was like warm moss under his feet; he had breakfasted just according to his taste, and he had the interesting occupations of a large proprietor to fill the morning. All through the house now, steps were noiseless on carpets or on fine matting; there was warmth in hall and corridors; there were servants enough to do everything, and to do it at the right time. Skilful Dominic was always at hand to meet his master's demands, and his bland pre-

sence diffused itself like a smile over the household, infecting the gloomy English mind with the belief that life was easy, and making his real predominance seem as soft and light as a down quilt. Old Mr Transome had gathered new courage and strength since little Harry and Dominic had come, and since Harold had insisted on his taking drives. Mrs Transome herself was seen on a fresh background with a gown of rich new stuff. And if, in spite of this, she did not seem happy, Harold either did not observe it, or kindly ignored it as the necessary frailty of elderly women whose lives have had too much of dulness and privation. Our minds get tricks and attitudes as our bodies do, thought Harold, and age stiffens them into unalterableness. "Poor mother! I confess I should not like to be an elderly woman myself. One requires a good deal of the purring cat for that, or else of the loving grandame. I wish she would take more to little Harry. I suppose she has her suspicions about the lad's mother, and is as rigid in those matters as in her Toryism. However, I do what I can; it would be difficult to say what there is wanting to her in the way of indulgence and luxury to make up for the old niggardly life."

And certainly Transome Court was now such a

home as many women would covet. Yet even Harold's own satisfaction in the midst of its elegant comfort needed at present to be sustained by the expectation of gratified resentment. He was obviously less bright and enjoying than usual, and his mother, who watched him closely without daring to ask questions, had gathered hints and drawn inferences enough to make her feel sure that there was some storm gathering between him and Jermyn. She did not dare to ask questions, and yet she had not resisted the temptation to say something bitter about Harold's failure to get returned as a Radical, helping, with feminine self-defeat, to exclude herself more completely from any consultation by him. In this way poor women, whose power lies solely in their influence, make themselves like music out of tune, and only move men to run away.

This morning Harold had ordered his letters to be brought to him at the breakfast-table, which was not his usual practice. His mother could see that there were London business letters about which he was eager, and she had found out that the letter brought by a clerk the day before was to make an appointment with Harold for Jermyn to come to Transome Court at eleven this morning. She observed Harold swallow his coffee and push away

his plate with an early abstraction from the business of breakfast which was not at all after his usual manner. She herself ate nothing; her sips of tea seemed to excite her; her cheeks flushed, and her hands were cold. She was still young and ardent in her terrors; the passions of the past were living in her dread.

When Harold left the table she went into the long drawing-room, where she might relieve her restlessness by walking up and down, and catch the sound of Jermyn's entrance into Harold's room, which was close by. Here she moved to and fro amongst the rose-coloured satin of chairs and curtains — the great story of this world reduced for her to the little tale of her own existence—dull obscurity everywhere, except where the keen light fell on the narrow track of her own lot, wide only for a woman's anguish. At last she heard the expected ring and footstep, and the opening and closing door. Unable to walk about any longer, she sank into a large cushioned chair, helpless and prayerless. She was not thinking of God's anger or mercy, but of her son's. She was thinking of what might be brought, not by death, but by life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

M. Check to your queen!
N. Nay, your own king is bare,
And moving so, you give yourself checkmate.

WHEN Jermyn entered the room, Harold, who was seated at his library table examining papers, with his back towards the light and his face towards the door, moved his head coldly. Jermyn said an ungracious "Good-morning"—as little as possible like a salutation to one who might regard himself as a patron. On the attorney's handsome face there was a black cloud of defiant determination, slightly startling to Harold, who had expected to feel that the overpowering weight of temper in the interview was on his own side. Nobody was ever prepared beforehand for this expression of Jermyn's face, which seemed as strongly contrasted with the cold impenetrableness which he preserved under the ordinary annoyances of business as with the bland radiance of his lighter moments.

Harold himself did not look amiable just then, but his anger was of the sort that seeks a vent without waiting to give a fatal blow; it was that of a nature more subtly mixed than Jermyn's—less animally forcible, less unwavering in selfishness, and with more of high-bred pride. He looked at Jermyn with increased disgust and secret wonder.

"Sit down," he said, curtly.

Jermyn seated himself in silence, opened his greatcoat, and took some papers from a side-pocket.

"I have written to Makepeace," said Harold, "to tell him to take the entire management of the election expenses. So you will transmit your accounts to him."

"Very well. I am come this morning on other business."

"If it's about the riot and the prisoners, I have only to say that I shall enter into no plans. If I am called on, I shall say what I know about that young fellow Felix Holt. People may prove what they can about Johnson's damnable tricks, or yours either."

"I am not come to speak about the riot. I agree with you in thinking that quite a subordinate subject." (When Jermyn had the black cloud over his

face, he never hesitated or drawled, and made no Latin quotations.)

"Be so good, then, as to open your business at once," said Harold, in a tone of imperious indifference.

"That is precisely what I wish to do. I have here information from a London correspondent that you are about to file a bill against me in Chancery." Jermyn, as he spoke, laid his hand on the papers before him, and looked straight at Harold.

"In that case the question for you is, how far your conduct as the family solicitor will bear investigation. But it is a question which you will consider quite apart from me."

"Doubtless. But prior to that there is a question which we must consider together."

The tone in which Jermyn said this gave an unpleasant shock to Harold's sense of mastery. Was it possible that he should have the weapon wrenched out of his hand?

"I shall know what to think of that," he replied, as haughtily as ever, "when you have stated what the question is."

"Simply, whether you will choose to retain the family estates, or lay yourself open to be forthwith legally deprived of them."

"I presume you refer to some underhand scheme of your own, on a par with the annuities you have drained us by in the name of Johnson," said Harold, feeling a new movement of anger. "If so, you had better state your scheme to my lawyers, Dymock and Halliwell."

"No. I think you will approve of my stating in your own ear first of all, that it depends on my will whether you remain an important landed proprietor in North Loamshire, or whether you retire from the county with the remainder of the fortune you have acquired in trade."

Jermyn paused, as if to leave time for this morsel to be tasted.

"What do you mean?" said Harold, sharply.

"Not any scheme of mine; but a state of the facts, resulting from the settlement of the estate made in 1729: a state of the facts which renders your father's title and your own title to the family estates utterly worthless as soon as the true claimant is made aware of his right."

"And you intend to inform him?"

"That depends. I am the only person who has the requisite knowledge. It rests with you to decide whether I shall use that knowledge against you; or whether I shall use it in your favour—by

putting an end to the evidence that would serve to oust you in spite of your 'robust title of occupancy.'"

Jermyn paused again. He had been speaking slowly, but without the least hesitation, and with a bitter definiteness of enunciation. There was a moment or two before Harold answered, and then he said abruptly,

"I don't believe you."

"I thought you were more shrewd," said Jermyn, with a touch of scorn. "I thought you understood that I had had too much experience to waste my time in telling fables to persuade a man who has put himself into the attitude of my deadly enemy."

"Well, then, say at once what your proofs are," said Harold, shaking in spite of himself, and getting nervous.

"I have no inclination to be lengthy. It is not more than a few weeks since I ascertained that there is in existence an heir of the Bycliffes, the old adversaries of your family. More curiously, it is only a few days ago—in fact, only since the day of the riot—that the Bycliffe claim has become valid, and that the right of remainder accrues to the heir in question."

"And how, pray?" said Harold, rising from his chair, and making a turn in the room, with his hands thrust in his pockets. Jermyn rose too, and stood near the hearth facing Harold, as he moved to and fro.

"By the death of an old fellow who got drunk, and was trampled to death in the riot. He was the last of that Thomas Transome's line, by the purchase of whose interest your family got its title to the estate. Your title died with him. It was supposed that the line had become extinct before—and on that supposition the old Bycliffes founded their claim. But I hunted up this man just about the time the last suit was closed. His death would have been of no consequence to you if there had not been a Bycliffe in existence; but I happen to know that there is, and that the fact can be legally proved."

For a minute or two Harold did not speak, but continued to pace the room, while Jermyn kept his position, holding his hands behind him. At last Harold said, from the other end of the room, speaking in a scornful tone,

"That sounds alarming. But it is not to be proved simply by your statement."

"Clearly. I have here a document, with a copy,

which will back my statement. It is the opinion given on the case more than twenty years ago, and it bears the signature of the Attorney-General and the first conveyancer of the day."

Jermyn took up the papers he had laid on the table, opening them slowly and coolly as he went on speaking, and as Harold advanced towards him.

"You may suppose that we spared no pains to ascertain the state of the title in the last suit against Maurice Christian Bycliffe, which threatened to be a hard run. This document is the result of a consultation; it gives an opinion which must be taken as a final authority. You may cast your eyes over that, if you please; I will wait your time. Or you may read the summing-up here," Jermyn ended, holding out one of the papers to Harold, and pointing to a final passage.

Harold took the paper, with a slight gesture of impatience. He did not choose to obey Jermyn's indication, and confine himself to the summing-up. He ran through the document. But in truth he was too much excited really to follow the details, and was rather acting than reading, till at length he threw himself into his chair and consented to bend his attention on the passage to which Jermyn had

pointed. The attorney watched him as he read and twice re-read :—

"*To sum up . . . . . we are of opinion that the title of the present possessors of the Transome estates can be strictly proved to rest solely upon a base fee created under the original settlement of* 1729, *and to be good so long only as issue exists of the tenant in tail by whom that base fee was created. We feel satisfied by the evidence that such issue exists in the person of Thomas Transome, otherwise Trounsem, of Littleshaw. But upon his decease without issue we are of opinion that the right in remainder of the Bycliffe family will arise, which right would not be barred by any statute of limitation.*"

When Harold's eyes were on the signatures to this document for the third time, Jermyn said,

"As it turned out, the case being closed by the death of the claimant, we had no occasion for producing Thomas Transome, who was the old fellow I tell you of. The inquiries about him set him agog, and after they were dropped he came into this neighbourhood, thinking there was something fine in store for him. Here, if you like to take it, is a memorandum about him. I repeat, that he

died in the riot. The proof is ready. And I repeat, that, to my knowledge, and mine only, there is a Bycliffe in existence; and that I know how the proof can be made out."

Harold rose from his chair again, and again paced the room. He was not prepared with any defiance.

"And where is he—this Bycliffe?" he said at last, stopping in his walk, and facing round towards Jermyn.

"I decline to say more till you promise to suspend proceedings against me."

Harold turned again, and looked out of the window, without speaking for a moment or two. It was impossible that there should not be a conflict within him, and at present it was a very confused one. At last he said,

"This person is in ignorance of his claim?"

"Yes."

"Has been brought up in an inferior station?"

"Yes," said Jermyn, keen enough to guess part of what was going on in Harold's mind. "There is no harm in leaving him in ignorance. The question is a purely legal one. And, as I said before, the complete knowledge of the case, as one of evidence, lies exclusively with me. I can nullify the evi-

dence, or I can make it tell with certainty against you. The choice lies with you."

"I must have time to think of this," said Harold, conscious of a terrible pressure.

"I can give you no time unless you promise me to suspend proceedings.".

"And then, when I ask you, you will lay the details before me?"

"Not without a thorough understanding beforehand. If I engage not to use my knowledge against you, you must engage in writing that on being satisfied by the details, you will cancel all hostile proceedings against me, and will not institute fresh ones on the strength of any occurrences now past."

"Well, I must have time," said Harold, more than ever inclined to thrash the attorney, but feeling bound hand and foot with knots that he was not sure he could ever unfasten.

"That is to say," said Jermyn, with his black-browed persistence, "you will write to suspend proceedings."

Again Harold paused. He was more than ever exasperated, but he was threatened, mortified, and confounded by the necessity for an immediate decision between alternatives almost equally hateful

to him. It was with difficulty that he could prevail on himself to speak any conclusive words. He walked as far as he could from Jermyn—to the other end of the room—then walked back to his chair and threw himself into it. At last he said, without looking at Jermyn, "I agree—I must have time."

"Very well. It is a bargain."

"No further than this," said Harold, hastily, flashing a look at Jermyn—"no further than this, that I require time, and therefore I give it to you."

"Of course. You require time to consider whether the pleasure of trying to ruin me—me to whom you are really indebted—is worth the loss of the Transome estates.—I shall wish you good-morning."

Harold did not speak to him or look at him again, and Jermyn walked out of the room. As he appeared outside the door and closed it behind him, Mrs Transome showed her white face at another door which opened on a level with Harold's in such a way that it was just possible for Jermyn not to see her. He availed himself of that possibility, and walked straight across the hall, where there was no servant in attendance to let him out, as if he believed that no one was looking at him who could

expect recognition. He did not want to speak to Mrs Transome at present; he had nothing to ask from her, and one disagreeable interview had been enough for him this morning.

She was convinced that he had avoided her, and she was too proud to arrest him. She was as insignificant now in his eyes as in her son's. "Men have no memories in their hearts," she said to herself, bitterly. Turning into her sitting-room, she heard the voices of Mr Transome and little Harry at play together. She would have given a great deal at this moment if her feeble husband had not always lived in dread of her temper and her tyranny, so that he might have been fond of her now. She felt herself loveless; if she was important to any one, it was only to her old waiting-woman Denner.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Are these things then necessities?
Then let us meet them like necessities.

SHAKSPEARE: *Henry IV.*

See now the virtue living in a word!
Hobson will think of swearing it was noon
When he saw Dobson at the May-day fair,
To prove poor Dobson did not rob the mail.
'Tis neighbourly to save a neighbour's neck:
What harm in lying when you mean no harm?
But say 'tis perjury, then Hobson quakes—
He'll none of perjury.
Thus words embalm
The conscience of mankind; and Roman laws
Bring still a conscience to poor Hobson's aid.

Few men would have felt otherwise than Harold Transome felt, if, having a reversion tantamount to possession of a fine estate, carrying an association with an old name and considerable social importance, they were suddenly informed that there was a person who had a legal right to deprive them of these advantages; that person's right having never been contemplated by any one as more than a chance, and being quite unknown to himself. In ordinary cases a shorter possession than Harold's

family had enjoyed was allowed by the law to constitute an indefeasible right; and if in rare and peculiar instances the law left the possessor of a long inheritance exposed to deprivation as a consequence of old obscure transactions, the moral reasons for giving legal validity to the title of long occupancy were not the less strong. Nobody would have said that Harold was bound to hunt out this alleged remainder-man and urge his rights upon him; on the contrary, all the world would have laughed at such conduct, and he would have been thought an interesting patient for a mad-doctor. The unconscious remainder-man was probably much better off left in his original station: Harold would not have been called upon to consider his existence, if it had not been presented to him in the shape of a threat from one who had power to execute the threat.

In fact, what he would have done had the circumstances been different was much clearer than what he should choose to do or feel himself compelled to do in the actual crisis. He would not have been disgraced if, on a valid claim being urged, he had got his lawyers to fight it out for him on the chance of eluding the claim by some adroit technical management. Nobody off the stage could be sentimental about these things, or pretend to shed tears of

joy because an estate was handed over from a gentleman to a mendicant sailor with a wooden leg. And this chance remainder-man was perhaps some such specimen of inheritance as the drunken fellow killed in the riot. All the world would think the actual Transomes in the right to contest any adverse claim to the utmost. But then—it was not certain that they would win in the contest; and not winning, they would incur other loss besides that of the estate. There had been a little too much of such loss already.

But why, if it were not wrong to contest the claim, should he feel the most uncomfortable scruples about robbing the claim of its sting by getting rid of its evidence? It was a mortal disappointment—it was a sacrifice of indemnification—to abstain from punishing Jermyn. But even if he brought his mind to contemplate that as the wiser course, he still shrank from what looked like complicity with Jermyn; he still shrank from the secret nullification of a just legal claim. If he had only known the details, if he had known who this alleged heir was, he might have seen his way to some course that would not have grated on his sense of honour and dignity. But Jermyn had been too acute to let Harold know this: he had even

carefully kept to the masculine pronoun. And he believed that there was no one besides himself who would or could make Harold any wiser. He went home persuaded that between this interview and the next which they would have together, Harold would be left to an inward debate, founded entirely on the information he himself had given. And he had not much doubt that the result would be what he desired. Harold was no fool: there were many good things he liked better in life than an irrational vindictiveness.

And it did happen that, after writing to London in fulfilment of his pledge, Harold spent many hours over that inward debate, which was not very different from what Jermyn imagined. He took it everywhere with him, on foot and on horseback, and it was his companion through a great deal of the night. His nature was not of a kind given to internal conflict, and he had never before been long undecided and puzzled. This unaccustomed state of mind was so painfully irksome to him—he rebelled so impatiently against the oppression of circumstances in which his quick temperament and habitual decision could not help him—that it added tenfold to his hatred of Jermyn, who was the cause of it. And thus, as the temptation to avoid

all risk of losing the estate grew and grew till scruples looked minute by the side of it, the difficulty of bringing himself to make a compact with Jermyn seemed more and more insurmountable.

But we have seen that the attorney was much too confident in his calculations. And while Harold was being galled by his subjection to Jermyn's knowledge, independent information was on its way to him. The messenger was Christian, who, after as complete a survey of probabilities as he was capable of, had come to the conclusion that the most profitable investment he could make of his peculiar experience and testimony in relation to Bycliffe and Bycliffe's daughter, was to place them at the disposal of Harold Transome. He was afraid of Jermyn; he utterly distrusted Johnson; but he thought he was secure in relying on Harold Transome's care for his own interest; and he preferred above all issues the prospect of forthwith leaving the country with a sum that at least for a good while would put him at his ease.

When, only three mornings after the interview with Jermyn, Dominic opened the door of Harold's sitting-room, and said that "Meester Chreestian," Mr Philip Debarry's courier and an acquaintance of his own at Naples, requested to be admitted on business

of importance, Harold's immediate thought was that the business referred to the so-called political affairs which were just now his chief association with the name of Debarry, though it seemed an oddness requiring explanation that a servant should be personally an intermediary. He assented, expecting something rather disagreeable than otherwise.

Christian wore this morning those perfect manners of a subordinate who is not servile, which he always adopted towards his unquestionable superiors. Mr Debarry, who preferred having some one about him with as little resemblance as possible to a regular servant, had a singular liking for the adroit, quiet-mannered Christian, and would have been amazed to see the insolent assumption he was capable of in the presence of people like Mr Lyon, who were of no account in society. Christian had that sort of cleverness which is said to "know the world"—that is to say, he knew the price-current of most things.

Aware that he was looked at as a messenger while he remained standing near the door with his hat in his hand, he said, with respectful ease,

"You will probably be surprised, sir, at my coming to speak to you on my own account; and, in fact, I could not have thought of doing so if my

business did not happen to be something of more importance to you than to any one else."

"You don't come from Mr Debarry, then?" said Harold, with some surprise.

"No, sir. My business is a secret; and, if you please, must remain so."

"Is it a pledge you are demanding from me?" said Harold, rather suspiciously, having no ground for confidence in a man of Christian's position.

"Yes, sir; I am obliged to ask no less than that you will pledge yourself not to take Mr Jermyn into confidence concerning what passes between us."

"With all my heart," said Harold, something like a gleam passing over his face. His circulation had become more rapid. "But what have you had to do with Jermyn?"

"He has not mentioned me to you then—has he, sir?"

"No; certainly not—never."

Christian thought, "Aha, Mr Jermyn! you are keeping the secret well, are you?" He said, aloud,

"Then Mr Jermyn has never mentioned to you, sir, what I believe he is aware of—that there is danger of a new suit being raised against you on the part of a Bycliffe, to get the estate?"

"Ah!" said Harold, starting up, and placing him-

self with his back against the mantelpiece. He was electrified by surprise at the quarter from which this information was coming. Any fresh alarm was counteracted by the flashing thought that he might be enabled to act independently of Jermyn; and in the rush of feelings he could utter no more than an interjection. Christian concluded that Harold had had no previous hint.

"It is this fact, sir, that I came to tell you of."

"From some other motive than kindness to me, I presume," said Harold, with a slight approach to a smile.

"Certainly," said Christian, as quietly as if he had been stating yesterday's weather. "I should not have the folly to use any affectation with you, Mr Transome. I lost considerable property early in life, and am now in the receipt of a salary simply. In the affair I have just mentioned to you I can give evidence which will turn the scale against you. I have no wish to do so, if you will make it worth my while to leave the country."

Harold listened as if he had been a legendary hero, selected for peculiar solicitation by the Evil One. Here was temptation in a more alluring form than before, because it was sweetened by the prospect of eluding Jermyn. But the desire to gain

time served all the purposes of caution and resistance, and his indifference to the speaker in this case helped him to preserve perfect self-command.

"You are aware," he said, coolly, "that silence is not a commodity worth purchasing unless it is loaded. There are many persons, I dare say, who would like me to pay their travelling expenses for them. But they might hardly be able to show me that it was worth my while."

"You wish me to state what I know?"

"Well, that is a necessary preliminary to any further conversation."

"I think you will see, Mr Transome, that, as a matter of justice, the knowledge I can give is worth something, quite apart from my future appearance or non-appearance as a witness. I must take care of my own interest, and if anything should hinder you from choosing to satisfy me for taking an essential witness out of the way, I must at least be paid for bringing you the information."

"Can you tell me who and where this Bycliffe is?"

"I can."

"——And give me a notion of the whole affair?"

"Yes: I have talked to a lawyer—not Jermyn—who is at the bottom of the law in the affair."

"You must not count on any wish of mine to suppress evidence or remove a witness. But name your price for the information."

"In that case I must be paid the higher for my information. Say, two thousand pounds."

"Two thousand devils!" burst out Harold, throwing himself into his chair again, and turning his shoulder towards Christian. New thoughts crowded upon him. "This fellow may want to decamp for some reason or other," he said to himself. "More people besides Jermyn know about his evidence, it seems. The whole thing may look black for me if it comes out. I shall be believed to have bribed him to run away, whether or not." Thus the outside conscience came in aid of the inner.

"I will not give you one sixpence for your information," he said, resolutely, "until time has made it clear that you do not intend to decamp, but will be forthcoming when you are called for. On those terms I have no objection to give you a note, specifying that after the fulfilment of that condition —that is, after the occurrence of a suit, or the understanding that no suit is to occur—I will pay you a certain sum in consideration of the information you now give me!"

Christian felt himself caught in a vice. In the

first instance he had counted confidently on Harold's ready seizure of his offer to disappear, and after some words had seemed to cast a doubt on this presupposition, he had inwardly determined to go away, whether Harold wished it or not, if he could get a sufficient sum. He did not reply immediately, and Harold waited in silence, inwardly anxious to know what Christian could tell, but with a vision at present so far cleared that he was determined not to risk incurring the imputation of having anything to do with scoundrelism. We are very much indebted to such a linking of events as makes a doubtful action look wrong.

Christian was reflecting that if he stayed, and faced some possible inconveniences of being known publicly as Henry Scaddon for the sake of what he might get from Esther, it would at least be wise to be certain of some money from Harold Transome, since he turned out to be of so peculiar a disposition as to insist on a punctilious honesty to his own disadvantage. Did he think of making a bargain with the other side? If so, he might be content to wait for the knowledge till it came in some other way. Christian was beginning to be afraid lest he should get nothing by this clever move of coming to Transome Court. At last he said,

"I think, sir, two thousand would not be an unreasonable sum, on those conditions."

"I will not give two thousand."

"Allow me to say, sir, you must consider that there is no one whose interest it is to tell you as much as I shall, even if they could; since Mr Jermyn, who knows it, has not thought fit to tell you. There may be use you don't think of in getting the information at once."

"Well?"

"I think a gentleman should act liberally under such circumstances."

"So I will."

"I could not take less than a thousand pounds. It really would not be worth my while. If Mr Jermyn knew I gave you the information, he would endeavour to injure me."

"I will give you a thousand," said Harold, immediately, for Christian had unconsciously touched a sure spring. "At least, I'll give you a note to the effect I spoke of."

He wrote as he had promised, and gave the paper to Christian.

"Now, don't be circuitous," said Harold. "You seem to have a business-like gift of speech. Who and where is this Bycliffe?"

"You will be surprised to hear, sir, that she is supposed to be the daughter of the old preacher, Lyon, in Malthouse Yard."

"Good God! How can that be?" said Harold. At once, the first occasion on which he had seen Esther rose in his memory—the little dark parlour —the graceful girl in blue, with the surprisingly distinguished manners and appearance.

"In this way. Old Lyon, by some strange means or other, married Bycliffe's widow when this girl was a baby. And the preacher didn't want the girl to know that he was not her real father: he told me that himself. But she is the image of Bycliffe, whom I knew well—an uncommonly fine woman—steps like a queen."

"I have seen her," said Harold, more than ever glad to have purchased this knowledge. "But now, go on."

Christian proceeded to tell all he knew, including his conversation with Jermyn, except so far as it had an unpleasant relation to himself.

"Then," said Harold, as the details seemed to have come to a close, "you believe that Miss Lyon and her supposed father are at present unaware of the claims that might be urged for her on the strength of her birth?"

"I believe so. But I need not tell you that where the lawyers are on the scent you can never be sure of anything long together. I must remind you, sir, that you have promised to protect me from Mr Jermyn by keeping my confidence."

"Never fear. Depend upon it, I shall betray nothing to Mr Jermyn."

Christian was dismissed with a "good-morning;" and while he cultivated some friendly reminiscences with Dominic, Harold sat chewing the cud of his new knowledge, and finding it not altogether so bitter as he had expected.

From the first, after his interview with Jermyn, the recoil of Harold's mind from the idea of strangling a legal right threw him on the alternative of attempting a compromise. Some middle course might be possible, which would be a less evil than a costly lawsuit, or than the total renunciation of the estates. And now he had learned that the new claimant was a woman—a young woman, brought up under circumstances that would make the fourth of the Transome property seem to her an immense fortune. Both the sex and the social condition were of the sort that lies open to many softening influences. And having seen Esther, it was inevitable that, amongst the various issues, agreeable

and disagreeable, depicted by Harold's imagination, there should present itself a possibility that would unite the two claims—his own, which he felt to be the rational, and Esther's, which apparently was the legal claim.

Harold, as he had constantly said to his mother, was "not a marrying man;" he did not contemplate bringing a wife to Transome Court for many years to come, if at all. Having little Harry as an heir, he preferred freedom. Western women were not to his taste: they showed a transition from the feebly animal to the thinking being, which was simply troublesome. Harold preferred a slow-witted large-eyed woman, silent and affectionate, with a load of black hair weighing much more heavily than her brains. He had seen no such woman in England, except one whom he had brought with him from the East.

Therefore Harold did not care to be married until or unless some surprising chance presented itself; and now that such a chance had occurred to suggest marriage to him, he would not admit to himself that he contemplated marrying Esther as a plan; he was only obliged to see that such an issue was not inconceivable. He was not going to take any step expressly directed towards that end: what he had

made up his mind to, as the course most satisfactory to his nature under present urgencies, was to behave to Esther with a frank gentlemanliness, which must win her good-will, and incline her to save his family interest as much as possible. He was helped to this determination by the pleasure of frustrating Jermyn's contrivance to shield himself from punishment; and his most distinct and cheering prospect was, that within a very short space of time he should not only have effected a satisfactory compromise with Esther, but should have made Jermyn aware, by a very disagreeable form of announcement, that Harold Transome was no longer afraid of him. Jermyn should bite the dust.

At the end of these meditations he felt satisfied with himself and light-hearted. He had rejected two dishonest propositions, and he was going to do something that seemed eminently graceful. But he needed his mother's assistance, and it was necessary that he should both confide in her and persuade her.

Within two hours after Christian left him, Harold begged his mother to come into his private room, and there he told her the strange and startling story, omitting, however, any particulars which would involve the identification of Christian as his

informant. Harold felt that his engagement demanded this reticence; and he told his mother that he was bound to conceal the source of that knowledge which he had got independently of Jermyn.

Mrs Transome said little in the course of the story: she made no exclamations, but she listened with close attention, and asked a few questions so much to the point as to surprise Harold. When he showed her the copy of the legal opinion which Jermyn had left with him, she said she knew it very well; she had a copy herself. The particulars of that last lawsuit were too well engraven on her mind: it happened at a time when there was no one to supersede her, and she was the virtual head of the family affairs. She was prepared to understand how the estate might be in danger; but nothing had prepared her for the strange details—for the way in which the new claimant had been reared and brought within the range of converging motives that had led to this revelation, least of all for the part Jermyn had come to play in the revelation. Mrs Transome saw these things through the medium of certain dominant emotions that made them seem like a long-ripening retribution. Harold perceived that she was painfully agitated, that she trembled, and that her white lips would not

readily lend themselves to speech. And this was hardly more than he expected. He had not liked the revelation himself when it had first come to him.

But he did not guess what it was in his narrative which had most pierced his mother. It was something that made the threat about the estate only a secondary alarm. Now, for the first time, she heard of the intended proceedings against Jermyn. Harold had not chosen to speak of them before; but having at last called his mother into consultation, there was nothing in his mind to hinder him from speaking without reserve of his determination to visit on the attorney his shameful maladministration of the family affairs.

Harold went through the whole narrative—of what he called Jermyn's scheme to catch him in a vice, and his power of triumphantly frustrating that scheme—in his usual rapid way, speaking with a final decisiveness of tone: and his mother felt that if she urged any counter-consideration at all, she could only do so when he had no more to say.

"Now, what I want you to do, mother, if you can see this matter as I see it," Harold said in conclusion, "is to go with me to call on this girl in Malthouse Yard. I will open the affair to her;

it appears she is not likely to have been informed yet; and you will invite her to visit you here at once, that all scandal, all hatching of law-mischief, may be avoided, and the thing may be brought to an amicable conclusion."

"It seems almost incredible—extraordinary—a girl in her position," said Mrs Transome, with difficulty. It would have seemed the bitterest humiliating penance if another sort of suffering had left any room in her heart.

"I assure you she is a lady; I saw her when I was canvassing, and was amazed at the time. You will be quite struck with her. It is no indignity for you to invite her."

"Oh," said Mrs Transome, with low-toned bitterness, "I must put up with all things as they are determined for me. When shall we go?"

"Well," said Harold, looking at his watch, "it is hardly two yet. We could really go to-day, when you have lunched. It is better to lose no time. I'll order the carriage."

"Stay," said Mrs Transome, making a desperate effort. "There is plenty of time. I shall not lunch. I have a word to say."

Harold withdrew his hand from the bell, and leaned against the mantelpiece to listen.

"You see I comply with your wish at once, Harold?"

"Yes, mother, I'm much obliged to you for making no difficulties."

"You ought to listen to me in return."

"Pray go on," said Harold, expecting to be annoyed.

"What is the good of having these Chancery proceedings against Jermyn?"

"Good? This good: that fellow has burdened the estate with annuities and mortgages to the extent of three thousand a-year; and the bulk of them, I am certain, he holds himself under the name of another man. And the advances this yearly interest represents, have not been much more than twenty thousand. Of course he has hoodwinked you, and my father never gave attention to these things. He has been up to all sorts of devil's work with the deeds; he didn't count on my coming back from Smyrna to fill poor Durfey's place. He shall feel the difference. And the good will be, that I shall save almost all the annuities for the rest of my father's life, which may be ten years or more, and I shall get back some of the money, and I shall punish a scoundrel. That is the good."

"He will be ruined."

"That's what I intend," said Harold, sharply.

"He exerted himself a great deal for us in the old suits: every one said he had wonderful zeal and ability," said Mrs Transome, getting courage and warmth as she went on. Her temper was rising.

"What he did, he did for his own sake, you may depend on that," said Harold, with a scornful laugh.

"There were very painful things in that last suit. You seem anxious, about this young woman, to avoid all further scandal and contests in the family. Why don't you wish to do it in this case? Jermyn might be willing to arrange things amicably—to make restitution as far as he can—if he has done anything wrong."

"I will arrange nothing amicably with him," said Harold, decisively. "If he has ever done anything scandalous as our agent, let him bear the infamy. And the right way to throw the infamy on him is to show the world that he has robbed us, and that I mean to punish him. Why do you wish to shield such a fellow, mother? It has been chiefly through him that you have had to lead such a thrifty miserable life—you who used to make as brilliant a figure as a woman need wish."

Mrs Transome's rising temper was turned into a horrible sensation, as painful as a sudden concussion from something hard and immovable when we have struck out with our fist, intending to hit something warm, soft, and breathing, like ourselves. Poor Mrs Transome's strokes were sent jarring back on her by a hard unalterable past. She did not speak in answer to Harold, but rose from the chair as if she gave up the debate.

"Women are frightened at everything, I know," said Harold, kindly, feeling that he had been a little harsh after his mother's compliance. "And you have been used for so many years to think Jermyn a law of nature. Come, mother," he went on, looking at her gently, and resting his hands on her shoulders, "look cheerful. We shall get through all these difficulties. And this girl — I daresay she will be quite an interesting visitor for you. You have not had any young girl about you for a long while. Who knows? she may fall deeply in love with me, and I may be obliged to marry her."

He spoke laughingly, only thinking how he could make his mother smile. But she looked at him seriously and said, "Do you mean that, Harold?"

"Am I not capable of making a conquest? Not too fat yet—a handsome, well-rounded youth of thirty-four?"

She was forced to look straight at the beaming face, with its rich dark colour, just bent a little over her. Why could she not be happy in this son whose future she had once dreamed of, and who had been as fortunate as she had ever hoped? The tears came, not plenteously, but making her dark eyes as large and bright as youth had once made them without tears.

"There, there!" said Harold, coaxingly. "Don't be afraid. You shall not have a daughter-in-law unless she is a pearl. Now we will get ready to go."

In half an hour from that time Mrs Transome came down, looking majestic in sables and velvet, ready to call on "the girl in Malthouse Yard." She had composed herself to go through this task. She saw there was nothing better to be done. After the resolutions Harold had taken, some sort of compromise with this oddly-placed heiress was the result most to be hoped for; if the compromise turned out to be a marriage—well, she had no reason to care much: she was already powerless. It remained to be seen what this girl was.

The carriage was to be driven round the back way, to avoid too much observation. But the late election affairs might account for Mr Lyon's receiving a visit from the unsuccessful Radical candidate.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

I also could speak as ye do; if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you.—*Book of Job.*

In the interval since Esther parted with Felix Holt on the day of the riot, she had gone through so much emotion, and had already had so strong a shock of surprise, that she was prepared to receive any new incident of an unwonted kind with comparative equanimity.

When Mr Lyon had got home again from his preaching excursion, Felix was already on his way to Loamford Jail. The little minister was terribly shaken by the news. He saw no clear explanation of Felix Holt's conduct; for the statements Esther had heard were so conflicting that she had not been able to gather distinctly what had come out in the examination by the magistrates. But Mr Lyon felt confident that Felix was innocent of any wish to abet a riot or the infliction of injuries; what he chiefly feared was that in the fatal encounter with

Tucker he had been moved by a rash temper, not sufficiently guarded against by a prayerful and humble spirit.

"My poor young friend is being taught with mysterious severity the evil of a too confident self-reliance," he said to Esther, as they sat opposite to each other, listening and speaking sadly.

"You will go and see him, father?"

"Verily will I. But I must straightway go and see that poor afflicted woman, whose soul is doubtless whirled about in this trouble like a shapeless and unstable thing driven by divided winds." Mr Lyon rose and took his hat hastily, ready to walk out, with his greatcoat flying open and exposing his small person to the keen air.

"Stay, father, pray, till you have had some food," said Esther, putting her hand on his arm. "You look quite weary and shattered."

"Child, I cannot stay I can neither eat bread nor drink water till I have learned more about this young man's deeds, what can be proved and what cannot be proved against him. I fear he has none to stand by him in this town, for even by the friends of our church I have been ofttimes rebuked because he seemed dear to me. But, Esther, my beloved child——"

Here Mr Lyon grasped her arm, and seemed in the need of speech to forget his previous haste. "I bear in mind this: the Lord knoweth them that are His; but we—we are left to judge by uncertain signs, that so we may learn to exercise hope and faith towards one another; and in this uncertainty I cling with awful hope to those whom the world loves not because their conscience, albeit mistakenly, is at war with the habits of the world. Our great faith, my Esther, is the faith of martyrs: I will not lightly turn away from any man who endures harshness because he will not lie; nay, though I would not wantonly grasp at ease of mind through an arbitrary choice of doctrine, I cannot but believe that the merits of the Divine Sacrifice are wider than our utmost charity. I once believed otherwise—but not now, not now."

The minister paused, and seemed to be abstractedly gazing at some memory: he was always liable to be snatched away by thoughts from the pursuit of a purpose which had seemed pressing. Esther seized the opportunity and prevailed on him to fortify himself with some of Lyddy's porridge before he went out on his tiring task of seeking definite trustworthy knowledge from the lips of various

witnesses, beginning with that feminine darkener of counsel, poor Mrs Holt.

She, regarding all her trouble about Felix in the light of a fulfilment of her own prophecies, treated the sad history with a preference for edification above accuracy, and for mystery above relevance, worthy of a commentator on the Apocalypse. She insisted chiefly, not on the important facts that Felix had sat at his work till after eleven, like a deaf man, had rushed out in surprise and alarm, had come back to report with satisfaction that things were quiet, and had asked her to set by his dinner for him—facts which would tell as evidence that Felix was disconnected with any project of disturbances, and was averse to them. These things came out incidentally in her long plaint to the minister; but what Mrs Holt felt it essential to state was, that long before Michaelmas was turned, sitting in her chair, she had said to Felix that there would be a judgment on him for being so certain sure about the Pills and the Elixir.

"And now, Mr Lyon," said the poor woman, who had dressed herself in a gown previously cast off, a front all out of curl, and a cap with no starch in it, while she held little coughing Job on her knee, —"and now you see—my words have come true

sooner than I thought they would. Felix may contradict me if he will; but there he is in prison, and here am I, with nothing in the world to bless myself with but half-a-crown a-week as I've saved by my own scraping, and this house I've got to pay rent for. It's not me has done wrong, Mr Lyon; there's nobody can say it of me—not the orphin child on my knee is more innicent o' riot and murder and anything else as is bad. But when you've got a son so masterful and stopping medicines as Providence has sent, and his betters have been taking up and down the country since before he was a baby, it's o' no use being good here below. But he *was* a baby, Mr Lyon, and I gave him the breast,"—here poor Mrs Holt's motherly love overcame her expository eagerness, and she fell more and more to crying as she spoke—"And to think there's folks saying now as he'll be transported, and his hair shaved off, and the treadmill, and everything. O dear!"

As Mrs Holt broke off into sobbing, little Job also, who had got a confused yet profound sense of sorrow, and of Felix being hurt and gone away, set up a little wail of wondering misery.

"Nay, Mistress Holt," said the minister soothingly, "enlarge not your grief by more than warrantable

grounds. I have good hope that my young friend your son will be delivered from any severe consequences beyond the death of the man Tucker, which I fear will ever be a sore burthen on his memory. I feel confident that a jury of his countrymen will discern between misfortune, or it may be misjudgment, and an evil will, and that he will be acquitted of any grave offence."

"He never stole anything in his life, Mr Lyon," said Mrs Holt, reviving. "Nobody can throw it in my face as my son ran away with money like the young man at the Bank—though he looked most respectable, and far different on a Sunday to what Felix ever did. And I know it's very hard fighting with constables; but they say Tucker's wife'll be a deal better off than she was before, for the great folks'll pension her, and she'll be put on all the charities, and her children at the Free School, and everything. Your trouble's easy borne when everybody gives it a lift for you; and if judge and jury wants to do right by Felix, they'll think of his poor mother, with the bread took out of her mouth, all but half-a-crown a-week and furniture—which, to be sure, is most excellent, and of my own buying—and got to keep this orphin child as Felix himself brought on me. And I might send him back to

his old grandfather on parish pay, but I'm not that woman, Mr Lyon: I've a tender heart. And here's his little feet and toes, like marbil; do but look" —here Mrs Holt drew off Job's sock and shoe, and showed a well-washed little foot—"and you'll perhaps say I might take a lodger; but it's easy talking; it isn't everybody at a loose-end wants a parlour and a bedroom; and if anything bad happens to Felix, I may as well go and sit in the parish Pound, and nobody to buy me out; for it's beyond everything how the church members find fault with my son. But I think they might leave his mother to find fault; for queer and masterful he might be, and flying in the face of the very Scripture about the physic, but he was most clever beyond anything—that I *will* say—and was his own father's lawful child, and me his mother, that was Mary Wall thirty years before ever I married his father." Here Mrs Holt's feelings again became too much for her, but she struggled on to say, sobbingly, "And if they're to transport him, I should like to go to the prison and take the orphin child; for he was most fond of having him on his lap, and said he'd never marry; and there was One above overheard him, for he's been took at his word."

Mr Lyon listened with low groans, and then tried

to comfort her by saying that he would himself go to Loamford as soon as possible, and would give his soul no rest till he had done all he could do for Felix.

On one point Mrs Holt's plaint tallied with his own forebodings, and he found them verified: the state of feeling in Treby among the Liberal Dissenting flock was unfavourable to Felix. None who had observed his conduct from the windows saw anything tending to excuse him, and his own account of his motives, given on his examination, was spoken of with head-shaking; if it had not been for his habit of always thinking himself wiser than other people, he would never have entertained such a wild scheme. He had set himself up for something extraordinary, and had spoken ill of respectable tradespeople. He had put a stop to the making of salable drugs, contrary to the nature of buying and selling, and to a due reliance on what Providence might effect in the human inside through the instrumentality of remedies unsuitable to the stomach, looked at in a merely secular light; and the result was what might have been expected. He had brought his mother to poverty, and himself into trouble. And what for? He had done no good to "the cause;" if he had fought about

Church-rates, or had been worsted in some struggle in which he was distinctly the champion of Dissent and Liberalism, his case would have been one for gold, silver, and copper subscriptions, in order to procure the best defence; sermons might have been preached on him, and his name might have floated on flags from Newcastle to Dorchester. But there seemed to be no edification in what had befallen Felix. The riot at Treby, "turn it which way you would," as Mr Muscat observed, was no great credit to Liberalism; and what Mr Lyon had to testify as to Felix Holt's conduct in the matter of the Sproxton men, only made it clear that the defence of Felix was the accusation of his party. The whole affair, Mr Nutwood said, was dark and inscrutable, and seemed not to be one in which the interference of God's servants would tend to give the glory where the glory was due. That a candidate for whom the richer church members had all voted should have his name associated with the encouragement of drunkenness, riot, and plunder, was an occasion for the enemy to blaspheme; and it was not clear how the enemy's mouth would be stopped by exertions in favour of a rash young man, whose interference had made things worse instead of better. Mr Lyon was warned lest his human partialities should

blind him to the interests of truth; it was God's cause that was endangered in this matter.

The little minister's soul was bruised; he himself was keenly alive to the complication of public and private regards in this affair, and suffered a good deal at the thought of Tory triumph in the demonstration that, excepting the attack on the Seven Stars, which called itself a Whig house, all damage to property had been borne by Tories. He cared intensely for his opinions, and would have liked events to speak for them in a sort of picture-writing that everybody could understand. The enthusiasms of the world are not to be stimulated by a commentary in small and subtle characters which alone can tell the whole truth; and the picture-writing in Felix Holt's troubles was of an entirely puzzling kind: if he were a martyr, neither side wanted to claim him. Yet the minister, as we have seen, found in his Christian faith a reason for clinging the more to one who had not a large party to back him. That little man's heart was heroic: he was not one of those Liberals who make their anxiety for "the cause" of Liberalism a plea for cowardly desertion.

Besides himself, he believed there was no one who could bear testimony to the remonstrances of Felix

concerning the treating of the Sproxton men, except Jermyn, Johnson, and Harold Transome. Though he had the vaguest idea of what could be done in the case, he fixed his mind on the probability that Mr Transome would be moved to the utmost exertion, if only as an atonement; but he dared not take any step until he had consulted Felix, who he foresaw was likely to have a very strong determination as to the help he would accept or not accept.

This last expectation was fulfilled. Mr Lyon returned to Esther, after his day's journey to Loamford and back, with less of trouble and perplexity in his mind: he had at least got a definite course marked out, to which he must resign himself. Felix had declared that he would receive no aid from Harold Transome, except the aid he might give as an honest witness. There was nothing to be done for him but what was perfectly simple and direct. Even if the pleading of counsel had been permitted (and at that time it was not) on behalf of a prisoner on trial for felony, Felix would have declined it: he would in any case have spoken in his own defence. He had a perfectly simple account to give, and needed not to avail himself of any legal adroitness. He consented to accept the services of a respectable

solicitor in Loamford, who offered to conduct his case without any fees. The work was plain and easy, Felix said. The only witnesses who had to be hunted up at all were some who could testify that he had tried to take the crowd down Hobb's Lane, and that they had gone to the Manor in spite of him.

"Then he is not so much cast down as you feared, father?" said Esther.

"No, child; albeit he is pale and much shaken for one so stalwart. He hath no grief, he says, save for the poor man Tucker, and for his mother; otherwise his heart is without a burthen. We discoursed greatly on the sad effect of all this for his mother, and on the perplexed condition of human things, whereby even right action seems to bring evil consequences, if we have respect only to our own brief lives, and not to that larger rule whereby we are stewards of the eternal dealings, and not contrivers of our own success."

"Did he say nothing about me, father?" said Esther, trembling a little, but unable to repress her egoism.

"Yea; he asked if you were well, and sent his affectionate regards. Nay, he bade me say something which appears to refer to your discourse to-

gether when I was not present. 'Tell her,' he said, 'whatever they sentence me to, she knows they can't rob me of my vocation. With poverty for my bride, and preaching and pedagoguy for my business, I am sure of a handsome establishment.' He laughed—doubtless bearing in mind some playfulness of thine."

Mr Lyon seemed to be looking at Esther as he smiled, but she was not near enough for him to discern the expression of her face. Just then it seemed made for melancholy rather than for playfulness. Hers was not a childish beauty; and when the sparkle of mischief, wit, and vanity was out of her eyes, and the large look of abstracted sorrow was there, you would have been surprised by a certain grandeur which the smiles had hidden. That changing face was the perfect symbol of her mixed susceptible nature, in which battle was inevitable, and the side of victory uncertain.

She began to look on all that had passed between herself and Felix as something not buried, but embalmed and kept as a relic in a private sanctuary. The very entireness of her preoccupation about him, the perpetual repetition in her memory of all that had passed between them, tended to produce this effect. She lived with him in the past; in the

future she seemed shut out from him. He was an influence above her life, rather than a part of it; some time or other, perhaps, he would be to her as if he belonged to the solemn admonishing skies, checking her self-satisfied pettiness with the suggestion of a wider life.

But not yet—not while her trouble was so fresh. For it was still *her* trouble, and not Felix Holt's. Perhaps it was a subtraction from his power over her, that she could never think of him with pity, because he always seemed to her too great and strong to be pitied: he wanted nothing. He evaded calamity by choosing privation. The best part of a woman's love is worship; but it is hard to her to be sent away with her precious spikenard rejected, and her long tresses too, that were let fall ready to soothe the wearied feet.

While Esther was carrying these things in her heart, the January days were beginning to pass by with their wonted wintry monotony, except that there was rather more of good cheer than usual remaining from the feast of Twelfth Night among the triumphant Tories, and rather more scandal than usual excited among the mortified Dissenters by the wilfulness of their minister. He had actually mentioned Felix Holt by name in his evening ser-

mon, and offered up a petition for him in the evening prayer, also by name—not as "a young Ishmaelite, whom we would fain see brought back from the lawless life of the desert, and seated in the same fold even with the sons of Judah and of Benjamin," a suitable periphrasis which Brother Kemp threw off without any effort, and with all the felicity of a suggestive critic. Poor Mrs Holt, indeed, even in the midst of her grief, experienced a proud satisfaction, that though not a church member she was now an object of congregational remark and ministerial allusion. Feeling herself a spotless character standing out in relief on a dark background of affliction, and a practical contradiction to that extreme doctrine of human depravity which she had never "given in to," she was naturally gratified and soothed by a notice which must be a recognition. But more influential hearers were of opinion, that in a man who had so many long sentences at command as Mr Lyon, so many parentheses and modifying clauses, this naked use of a non-scriptural Treby name in an address to the Almighty was all the more offensive. In a low unlettered local preacher of the Wesleyan persuasion such things might pass; but a certain style in prayer was demanded from Independents, the most educated body

in the ranks of orthodox Dissent. To Mr Lyon such notions seemed painfully perverse, and the next morning he was declaring to Esther his resolution stoutly to withstand them, and to count nothing common or unclean on which a blessing could be asked, when the tenor of his thoughts was completely changed by a great shock of surprise which made both himself and Esther sit looking at each other in speechless amazement.

The cause was a letter brought by a special messenger from Duffield; a heavy letter addressed to Esther in a business-like manner, quite unexampled in her correspondence. And the contents of the letter were more startling than its exterior. It began:

Madam,—Herewith we send you a brief abstract of evidence which has come within our knowledge, that the right of remainder whereby the lineal issue of Edward Bycliffe can claim possession of the estates of which the entail was settled by John Justus Transome in 1729, *now first accrues to you as the sole and lawful issue of Maurice Christian Bycliffe. We are confident of success in the prosecution of this claim, which will result to you in the possession of estates to the value, at the lowest, of from five to six thousand per annum*——

It was at this point that Esther, who was reading aloud, let her hand fall with the letter on her lap, and with a palpitating heart looked at her father, who looked again, in silence that lasted for two or three minutes. A certain terror was upon them both, though the thoughts that laid that weight on the tongue of each were different.

It was Mr Lyon who spoke first.

"This, then, is what the man named Christian referred to. I distrusted him, yet it seems he spoke truly."

"But," said Esther, whose imagination ran necessarily to those conditions of wealth which she could best appreciate, "do they mean that the Transomes would be turned out of Transome Court, and that I should go and live there? It seems quite an impossible thing."

"Nay, child, I know not. I am ignorant in these things, and the thought of worldly grandeur for you hath more of terror than of gladness for me. Nevertheless we must duly weigh all things, not considering aught that befalls us as a bare event, but rather as an occasion for faithful stewardship. Let us go to my study and consider this writing further."

How this announcement, which to Esther seemed as unprepared as if it had fallen from the skies,

came to be made to her by solicitors other than Batt & Cowley, the old lawyers of the Bycliffes, was by a sequence as natural, that is to say, as legally-natural, as any in the world. The secret worker of the apparent wonder was Mr Johnson, who, on the very day when he wrote to give his patron, Mr Jermyn, the serious warning that a bill was likely to be filed in Chancery against him, had carried forward with added zeal the business already commenced, of arranging with another firm his share in the profits likely to result from the prosecution of Esther Bycliffe's claim.

Jermyn's star was certainly going down, and Johnson did not feel an unmitigated grief. Beyond some troublesome declarations as to his actual share in transactions in which his name had been used, Johnson saw nothing formidable in prospect for himself. He was not going to be ruined, though Jermyn probably was: he was not a highflyer, but a mere climbing-bird, who could hold on and get his livelihood just as well if his wings were clipped a little. And, in the mean time, here was something to be gained in this Bycliffe business, which, it was not unpleasant to think, was a nut that Jermyn had intended to keep for his own particular cracking, and which would be rather a severe aston-

ishment to Mr Harold Transome, whose manners towards respectable agents were such as leave a smart in a man of spirit.

Under the stimulus of small many-mixed motives like these, a great deal of business has been done in the world by well-clad and, in 1833, clean-shaven men, whose names are on charity-lists, and who do not know that they are base. Mr Johnson's character was not much more exceptional than his double chin.

No system, religious or political, I believe, has laid it down as a principle that all men are alike virtuous, or even that all the people rated for £80 houses are an honour to their species.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The down we rest on in our aëry dreams
Has not been plucked from birds that live and smart:
'Tis but warm snow, that melts not.

THE story and the prospect revealed to Esther by the lawyers' letter, which she and her father studied together, had made an impression on her very different from what she had been used to figure to herself in her many day-dreams as to the effect of a sudden elevation in rank and fortune. In her day-dreams she had not traced out the means by which such a change could be brought about; in fact, the change had seemed impossible to her, except in her little private Utopia, which, like other Utopias, was filled with delightful results, independent of processes. But her mind had fixed itself habitually on the signs and luxuries of ladyhood, for which she had the keenest perception. She had seen the very mat in her carriage, had scented the dried rose-leaves in her corridors, had felt the soft carpets under her

pretty feet, and seen herself, as she rose from her sofa cushions, in the crystal panel that reflected a long drawing-room, where the conservatory flowers and the pictures of fair women left her still with the supremacy of charm. She had trodden the marble-firm gravel of her garden-walks and the soft deep turf of her lawn; she had had her servants about her filled with adoring respect, because of her kindness as well as her grace and beauty; and she had had several accomplished cavaliers all at once suing for her hand—one of whom, uniting very high birth with long dark eyelashes and the most distinguished talents, she secretly preferred, though his pride and hers hindered an avowal, and supplied the inestimable interest of retardation. The glimpses she had had in her brief life as a family governess, supplied her ready faculty with details enough of delightful still life to furnish her day-dreams; and no one who has not, like Esther, a strong natural prompting and susceptibility towards such things, and has at the same time suffered from the presence of opposite conditions, can understand how powerfully those minor accidents of rank which please the fastidious sense can preoccupy the imagination.

It seemed that almost everything in her day-dreams—cavaliers apart—must be found at Tran-

some Court. But now that fancy was becoming real, and the impossible appeared possible, Esther found the balance of her attention reversed: now that her ladyhood was not simply in Utopia, she found herself arrested and painfully grasped by the means through which the ladyhood was to be obtained. To her inexperience this strange story of an alienated inheritance, of such a last representative of pure-blooded lineage as old Thomas Transome the bill-sticker, above all of the dispossession hanging over those who actually held, and had expected always to hold, the wealth and position which were suddenly announced to be rightfully hers —all these things made a picture, not for her own tastes and fancies to float in with Elysian indulgence, but in which she was compelled to gaze on the degrading hard experience of other human beings, and on a humiliating loss which was the obverse of her own proud gain. Even in her times of most untroubled egoism Esther shrank from anything ungenerous; and the fact that she had a very lively image of Harold Transome and his gipsy-eyed boy in her mind, gave additional distinctness to the thought that if she entered they must depart. Of the elder Transomes she had a dimmer vision, and they were necessarily in the background to her sympathy.

She and her father sat with their hands locked, as they might have done if they had been listening to a solemn oracle in the days of old revealing unknown kinship and rightful heirdom. It was not that Esther had any thought of renouncing her fortune; she was incapable, in these moments, of condensing her vague ideas and feelings into any distinct plan of action, nor indeed did it seem that she was called upon to act with any promptitude. It was only that she was conscious of being strangely awed by something that was called good fortune; and the awe shut out any scheme of rejection as much as any triumphant joy in acceptance. Her first father, she learned, had died disappointed and in wrongful imprisonment, and an undefined sense of Nemesis seemed half to sanctify her inheritance, and counteract its apparent arbitrariness.

Felix Holt was present in her mind throughout: what he would say was an imaginary commentary that she was constantly framing, and the words that she most frequently gave him—for she dramatised under the inspiration of a sadness slightly bitter—were of this kind: "That is clearly your destiny—to be aristocratic, to be rich. I always saw that our lots lay widely apart. You are not fit for poverty, or any work of difficulty. But remember

what I once said to you about a vision of consequences; take care where your fortune leads you."

Her father had not spoken since they had ended their study and discussion of the story and the evidence as it was presented to them. Into this he had entered with his usual penetrating activity; but he was so accustomed to the impersonal study of narrative, that even in these exceptional moments the habit of half a century asserted itself, and he seemed sometimes not to distinguish the case of Esther's inheritance from a story in ancient history, until some detail recalled him to the profound feeling that a great, great change might be coming over the life of this child who was so close to him. At last he relapsed into total silence, and for some time Esther was not moved to interrupt it. He had sunk back in his chair, with his hand locked in hers, and was pursuing a sort of prayerful meditation: he lifted up no formal petition, but it was as if his soul travelled again over the facts he had been considering in the company of a guide ready to inspire and correct him. He was striving to purify his feeling in this matter from selfish or worldly dross—a striving which is that prayer without ceasing, sure to wrest an answer by its sublime importunity

There is no knowing how long they might have

sat in this way, if it had not been for the inevitable Lyddy reminding them dismally of dinner.

"Yes, Lyddy, we come," said Esther; and then, before moving,

"Is there any advice you have in your mind for me, father?" The sense of awe was growing in Esther. Her intensest life was no longer in her dreams, where she made things to her own mind: she was moving in a world charged with forces.

"Not yet, my dear—save this: that you will seek special illumination in this juncture, and, above all, be watchful that your soul be not lifted up within you by what, rightly considered, is rather an increase of charge, and a call upon you to walk along a path which is indeed easy to the flesh, but dangerous to the spirit."

"You would always live with me, father?" Esther spoke under a strong impulse—partly affection, partly the need to grasp at some moral help. But she had no sooner uttered the words than they raised a vision, showing, as by a flash of lightning, the incongruity of that past which had created the sanctities and affections of her life with that future which was coming to her. . . . The little rusty old minister, with the one luxury of his Sunday evening pipe, smoked up the kitchen chimney,

coming to live in the midst of grandeur . . . but no! her father, with the grandeur of his past sorrow and his long struggling labours, forsaking his vocation, and vulgarly accepting an existence unsuited to him. . . Esther's face flushed with the excitement of this vision and its reversed interpretation, which five months ago she would have been incapable of seeing. Her question to her father seemed like a mockery; she was ashamed. He answered slowly,

"Touch not that chord yet, child. I must learn to think of thy lot according to the demands of Providence. We will rest a while from the subject; and I will seek calmness in my ordinary duties."

The next morning nothing more was said. Mr Lyon was absorbed in his sermon-making, for it was near the end of the week, and Esther was obliged to attend to her pupils. Mrs Holt came by invitation with little Job to share their dinner of roast-meat; and, after much of what the minister called unprofitable discourse, she was quitting the house when she hastened back with an astonished face, to tell Mr Lyon and Esther, who were already in wonder at crashing, thundering sounds on the pavement, that there was a carriage stopping and stamping at the entry into Malthouse Yard, with "all sorts of fine liveries," and a lady and gentleman

inside. Mr Lyon and Esther looked at each other, both having the same name in their minds.

"If it's Mr Transome or somebody else as is great, Mr Lyon," urged Mrs Holt, "you'll remember my son, and say he's got a mother with a character they may inquire into as much as they like. And never mind what Felix says, for he's so masterful he'd stay in prison and be transported whether or no, only to have his own way. For it's not to be thought but what the great people could get him off if they would; and it's very hard with a King in the country and all the texts in Proverbs about the King's countenance, and Solomon and the live baby——"

Mr Lyon lifted up his hand deprecatingly, and Mrs Holt retreated from the parlour-door to a corner of the kitchen, the outer doorway being occupied by Dominic, who was inquiring if Mr and Miss Lyon were at home, and could receive Mrs Transome and Mr Harold Transome. While Dominic went back to the carriage Mrs Holt escaped with her tiny companion to Zachary's, the pew-opener, observing to Lyddy that she knew herself, and was not that woman to stay where she might not be wanted; whereupon Lyddy, differing fundamentally, admonished her parting ear that it

was well if she knew herself to be dust and ashes—silently extending the application of this remark to Mrs Transome as she saw the tall lady sweep in arrayed in her rich black and fur, with that fine gentleman behind her whose thick topknot of wavy hair, sparkling ring, dark complexion, and general air of worldly exaltation unconnected with chapel, were painfully suggestive to Lyddy of Herod, Pontius Pilate, or the much-quoted Gallio.

Harold Transome, greeting Esther gracefuly, presented his mother, whose eagle-like glance, fixed on her from the first moment of entering, seemed to Esther to pierce her through. Mrs Transome hardly noticed Mr Lyon, not from studied haughtiness, but from sheer mental inability to consider him—as a person ignorant of natural history is unable to consider a fresh-water polype otherwise than as a sort of animated weed, certainly not fit for table. But Harold saw that his mother was agreeably struck by Esther, who indeed showed to much advantage. She was not at all taken by surprise, and maintained a dignified quietude; but her previous knowledge and reflection about the possible dispossession of these Transomes gave her a softened feeling towards them which tinged her manners very agreeably.

Harold was carefully polite to the minister, throwing out a word to make him understand that he had an important part in the important business which had brought this unannounced visit; and the four made a group seated not far off each other near the window, Mrs Transome and Esther being on the sofa.

"You must be astonished at a visit from me, Miss Lyon," Mrs Transome began; "I seldom come to Treby Magna. Now I see you, the visit is an unexpected pleasure; but the cause of my coming is business of a serious nature, which my son will communicate to you."

"I ought to begin by saying that what I have to announce to you is the reverse of disagreeable, Miss Lyon," said Harold, with lively ease. "I don't suppose the world would consider it very good news for me; but a rejected candidate, Mr Lyon," Harold went on, turning graciously to the minister, "begins to be inured to loss and misfortune."

"Truly, sir," said Mr Lyon, with a rather sad solemnity, "your allusion hath a grievous bearing for me, but I will not retard your present purpose by further remark."

"You will never guess what I have to disclose,"

said Harold, again looking at Esther, "unless, indeed, you have had some previous intimation of it."

"Does it refer to law and inheritance?" said Esther, with a smile. She was already brightened by Harold's manner. The news seemed to be losing its chillness, and to be something really belonging to warm, comfortable, interesting life.

"Then you have already heard of it?" said Harold, inwardly vexed, but sufficiently prepared not to seem so.

"Only yesterday," said Esther, quite simply "I received a letter from some lawyers with a statement of many surprising things, showing that I was an heiress"—here she turned very prettily to address Mrs Transome—"which, as you may imagine, is one of the last things I could have supposed myself to be."

"My dear," said Mrs Transome with elderly grace, just laying her hand for an instant on Esther's, "it is a lot that would become you admirably."

Esther blushed, and said playfully,

"O, I know what to buy with fifty pounds a-year, but I know the price of nothing beyond that."

Her father sat looking at her through his spectacles, stroking his chin. It was amazing to herself

that she was taking so lightly now what had caused her such deep emotion yesterday.

"I daresay, then," said Harold, "you are more fully possessed of particulars than I am. So that my mother and I need only tell you what no one else can tell you—that is, what are her and my feelings and wishes under these new and unexpected circumstances."

"I am most anxious," said Esther, with a grave beautiful look of respect to Mrs Transome—"most anxious on that point. Indeed, being of course in uncertainty about it, I have not yet known whether I could rejoice." Mrs Transome's glance had softened. She liked Esther to look at her.

"Our chief anxiety," she said, knowing what Harold wished her to say, "is, that there may be no contest, no useless expenditure of money. Of course we will surrender what can be rightfully claimed."

"My mother expresses our feeling precisely, Miss Lyon," said Harold. "And I'm sure, Mr Lyon, you will understand our desire."

"Assuredly, sir. My daughter would in any case have had my advice to seek a conclusion which would involve no strife. We endcavour, sir, in our body, to hold to the apostolic rule that one Chris-

tian brother should not go to law with another; and I, for my part, would extend this rule to all my fellow-men, apprehending that the practice of our courts is little consistent with the simplicity that is in Christ."

"If it is to depend on my will," said Esther, "there is nothing that would be more repugnant to me than any struggle on such a subject. But can't the lawyers go on doing what they will in spite of me? It seems that this is what they mean."

"Not exactly," said Harold, smiling. "Of course they live by such struggles as you dislike. But we can thwart them by determining not to quarrel. It is desirable that we should consider the affair together, and put it into the hands of honourable solicitors. I assure you we Transomes will not contend for what is not our own."

"And this is what I have come to beg of you," said Mrs Transome. "It is that you will come to Transome Court—and let us take full time to arrange matters. Do oblige me: you shall not be teazed more than you like by an old woman: you shall do just as you please, and become acquainted with your future home, since it is to be yours. I can tell you a world of things that you will want to know; and the business can proceed properly."

"Do consent," said Harold, with winning brevity.

Esther was flushed, and her eyes were bright. It was impossible for her not to feel that the proposal was a more tempting step towards her change of condition than she could have thought of beforehand. She had forgotten that she was in any trouble. But she looked towards her father, who was again stroking his chin, as was his habit when he was doubting and deliberating.

"I hope you do not disapprove of Miss Lyon's granting us this favour?" said Harold to the minister.

"I have nothing to oppose to it, sir, if my daughter's own mind is clear as to her course."

"You will come—now—with us," said Mrs Transome, persuasively. "You will go back with us in the carriage."

Harold was highly gratified with the perfection of his mother's manner on this occasion, which he had looked forward to as difficult. Since he had come home again, he had never seen her so much at her ease, or with so much benignancy in her face. The secret lay in the charm of Esther's sweet young deference, a sort of charm that had not before entered into Mrs Transome's elderly life. Esther's pretty behaviour, it must be confessed, was not fed entirely from lofty moral sources: over and above her really

generous feeling, she enjoyed Mrs Transome's accent, the high-bred quietness of her speech, the delicate odour of her drapery. She had always thought that life must be particularly easy if one could pass it among refined people; and so it seemed at this moment. She wished, unmixedly, to go to Transome Court.

"Since my father has no objection," she said, "and you urge me so kindly. But I must beg for time to pack up a few clothes."

"By all means," said Mrs Transome. "We are not at all pressed."

When Esther had left the room, Harold said, "Apart from our immediate reason for coming, Mr Lyon, I could have wished to see you about these unhappy consequences of the election contest. But you will understand that I have been much preoccupied with private affairs."

"You have well said that the consequences are unhappy, sir. And but for a reliance on something more than human calculation, I know not which I should most bewail—the scandal which wrong-dealing has brought on right principles, or the snares which it laid for the feet of a young man who is dear to me. 'One soweth, and another reapeth,' is a verity that applies to evil as well as good."

"You are referring to Felix Holt. I have not neglected steps to secure the best legal help for the prisoners; but I am given to understand that Holt refuses any aid from me. I hope he will not go rashly to work in speaking in his own defence without any legal instruction. It is an opprobrium of our law that no counsel is allowed to plead for the prisoner in cases of felony A ready tongue may do a man as much harm as good in a court of justice. He piques himself on making a display, and displays a little too much."

"Sir, you know him not," said the little minister, in his deeper tone. "He would not accept, even if it were accorded, a defence wherein the truth was screened or avoided,—not from a vainglorious spirit of self-exhibition, for he hath a singular directness and simplicity of speech; but from an averseness to a profession wherein a man may without shame seek to justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him."

"It's a pity a fine young fellow should do himself harm by fanatical notions of that sort. I could at least have procured the advantage of first-rate consultation. He didn't look to me like a dreamy personage."

"Nor is he dreamy; rather, his excess lies in being too practical."

"Well, I hope you will not encourage him in such irrationality: the question is not one of misrepresentation, but of adjusting fact, so as to raise it to the power of evidence. Don't you see that?"

"I do, I do. But I distrust not Felix Holt's discernment in regard to his own case. He builds not on doubtful things, and hath no illusory hopes; on the contrary, he is of a too-scornful incredulity where I would fain see a more childlike faith. But he will hold no belief without action corresponding thereto; and the occasion of his return to this his native place at a time which has proved fatal, was no other than his resolve to hinder the sale of some drugs, which had chiefly supported his mother, but which his better knowledge showed him to be pernicious to the human frame. He undertook to support her by his own labour: but, sir, I pray you to mark—and old as I am, I will not deny that this young man instructs me herein—I pray you to mark the poisonous confusion of good and evil which is the wide-spreading effect of vicious practices. Through the use of undue electioneering means—concerning which, however, I do not accuse you farther than of having acted the part of him who washes his hands when he delivers up to others the exercise of an iniquitous power—Felix

Holt is, I will not scruple to say, the innocent victim of a riot; and that deed of strict honesty, whereby he took on himself the charge of his aged mother, seems now to have deprived her of sufficient bread, and is even an occasion of reproach to him from the weaker brethren."

"I shall be proud to supply her as amply as you think desirable," said Harold, not enjoying this lecture.

"I will pray you to speak of this question with my daughter, who, it appears, may herself have large means at command, and would desire to minister to Mistress Holt's needs with all friendship and delicacy. For the present, I can take care that she lacks nothing essential."

As Mr Lyon was speaking, Esther re-entered, equipped for her drive. She laid her hand on her father's arm, and said, "You will let my pupils know at once, will you, father?"

"Doubtless, my dear," said the old man, trembling a little under the feeling that this departure of Esther's was a crisis. Nothing again would be as it had been in their mutual life. But he feared that he was being mastered by a too-tender self-regard, and struggled to keep himself calm.

Mrs Transome and Harold had both risen.

"If you are quite ready, Miss Lyon," said Harold, divining that the father and daughter would like to have an unobserved moment, "I will take my mother to the carriage, and come back for you."

When they were alone, Esther put her hands on her father's shoulders, and kissed him.

"This will not be a grief to you, I hope, father? You think it is better that I should go?"

"Nay, child, I am weak. But I would fain be capable of a joy quite apart from the accidents of my aged earthly existence, which, indeed, is a petty and almost dried-up fountain—whereas to the receptive soul the river of life pauseth not, nor is diminished."

"Perhaps you will see Felix Holt again, and tell him everything?"

"Shall I say aught to him for you?"

"O no; only that Job Tudge has a little flannel shirt and a box of lozenges," said Esther, smiling. "Ah, I hear Mr Transome coming back. I must say good-bye to Lyddy, else she will cry over my hard heart."

In spite of all the grave thoughts that had been, Esther felt it a very pleasant as well as new experience to be led to the carriage by Harold Transome, to be seated on soft cushions, and bowled

along, looked at admiringly and deferentially by a person opposite, whom it was agreeable to look at in return, and talked to with suavity and liveliness. Towards what prospect was that easy carriage really leading her? She could not be always asking herself Mentor-like questions. Her young bright nature was rather weary of the sadness that had grown heavier in these last weeks, like a chill white mist hopelessly veiling the day. Her fortune was beginning to appear worthy of being called good fortune. She had come to a new stage in her journey; a new day had arisen on new scenes, and her young untired spirit was full of curiosity.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

No man believes that many-textured knowledge and skill—as a just idea of the solar system, or the power of painting flesh, or of reading written harmonies—can come late and of a sudden; yet many will not stick at believing that happiness can come at any day and hour solely by a new disposition of events; though there is nought less capable of a magical production than a mortal's happiness, which is mainly a complex of habitual relations and dispositions not to be wrought by news from foreign parts, or any whirling of fortune's wheel for one on whose brow Time has written legibly.

SOME days after Esther's arrival at Transome Court, Denner, coming to dress Mrs Transome before dinner—a labour of love for which she had ample leisure now—found her mistress seated with more than ever of that marble aspect of self-absorbed suffering, which to the waiting-woman's keen observation had been gradually intensifying itself during the past week. She had tapped at the door without having been summoned, and she had ventured to enter though she had heard no voice saying "Come in."

Mrs Transome had on a dark warm dressing-gown, hanging in thick folds about her, and she

was seated before a mirror which filled a panel from the floor to the ceiling. The room was bright with the light of the fire and of wax candles. For some reason, contrary to her usual practice, Mrs Transome had herself unfastened her abundant grey hair, which rolled backward in a pale sunless stream over her dark dress. She was seated before the mirror apparently looking at herself, her brow knit in one deep furrow, and her jewelled hands laid one above the other on her knee. Probably she had ceased to see the reflection in the mirror, for her eyes had the fixed wide-open look that belongs not to examination, but to reverie. Motionless in that way, her clear-cut features keeping distinct record of past beauty, she looked like an image faded, dried, and bleached by uncounted suns, rather than a breathing woman who had numbered the years as they passed, and had a consciousness within her which was the slow deposit of those ceaseless rolling years.

Denner, with all her ingrained and systematic reserve, could not help showing signs that she was startled, when, peering from between her half-closed eyelids, she saw the motionless image in the mirror opposite to her as she entered. Her gentle opening of the door had not roused her mistress, to whom

the sensations produced by Denner's presence were as little disturbing as those of a favourite cat. But the slight cry, and the start reflected in the glass, were unusual enough to break the reverie: Mrs Transome moved, leaned back in her chair, and said,

"So you're come at last, Denner?"

"Yes, madam; it is not late. I'm sorry you should have undone your hair yourself."

"I undid it to see what an old hag I am. These fine clothes you put on me, Denner, are only a smart shroud."

"Pray don't talk so, madam. If there's anybody doesn't think it pleasant to look at you, so much the worse for them. For my part, I've seen no young ones fit to hold up your train. Look at your likeness down below; and though you're older now, what signifies? I wouldn't be Letty in the scullery because she's got red cheeks. She mayn't know she's a poor creature, but I know it, and that's enough for me: I know what sort of a dowdy draggletail she'll be in ten years' time. I would change with nobody, madam. And if troubles were put up to market, I'd sooner buy old than new. It's something to have seen the worst."

"A woman never has seen the worst till she is old, Denner," said Mrs Transome, bitterly.

The keen little waiting-woman was not clear as to the cause of her mistress's added bitterness; but she rarely brought herself to ask questions, when Mrs Transome did not authorise them by beginning to give her information. Banks the bailiff and the head-servant had nodded and winked a good deal over the certainty that Mr Harold was "none so fond" of Jermyn, but this was a subject on which Mrs Transome had never made up her mind to speak, and Denner knew nothing definite. Again, she felt quite sure that there was some important secret connected with Esther's presence in the house; she suspected that the close Dominic knew the secret, and was more trusted than she was, in spite of her forty years' service; but any resentment on this ground would have been an entertained reproach against her mistress, inconsistent with Denner's creed and character. She inclined to the belief that Esther was the immediate cause of the new discontent.

"If there's anything worse coming to you, I should like to know what it is, madam," she said, after a moment's silence, speaking always in the same low quick way, and keeping up her quiet labours. "When I awake at cock-crow, I'd sooner have one real grief on my mind than twenty false.

It's better to know one's robbed than to think one's going to be murdered."

"I believe you are the creature in the world that loves me best, Denner; yet you will never understand what I suffer. It's of no use telling you. There's no folly in you, and no heartache. You are made of iron. You have never had any trouble."

"I've had some of your trouble, madam."

"Yes, you good thing. But as a sick-nurse, that never caught the fever. You never even had a child."

"I can feel for things I never went through. I used to be sorry for the poor French Queen when I was young: I'd have lain cold for her to lie warm. I know people have feelings according to their birth and station. And you always took things to heart, madam, beyond anybody else. But I hope there's nothing new, to make you talk of the worst."

"Yes, Denner, there is—there is," said Mrs Transome, speaking in a low tone of misery, while she bent for her head-dress to be pinned on.

"Is it this young lady?"

"Why, what do you think about her, Denner?" said Mrs Transome, in a tone of more spirit, rather curious to hear what the old woman would say.

"I don't deny she's graceful, and she has a pretty

smile and very good manners: it's quite unaccountable by what Banks says about her father. I know nothing of those Treby townsfolk myself, but for my part I'm puzzled. I'm fond of Mr Harold. I always shall be, madam. I was at his bringing into the world, and nothing but his doing wrong by you would turn me against him. But the servants all say he's in love with Miss Lyon."

"I wish it were true, Denner," said Mrs Transome, energetically. "I wish he were in love with her, so that she could master him, and make him do what she pleased."

"Then it is not true—what they say?"

"Not true that she will ever master him. No woman ever will. He will make her fond of him, and afraid of him. That's one of the things you have never gone through, Denner. A woman's love is always freezing into fear. She wants everything, she is secure of nothing. This girl has a fine spirit—plenty of fire and pride and wit. Men like such captives, as they like horses that champ the bit and paw the ground: they feel more triumph in their mastery. What is the use of a woman's will?—if she tries, she doesn't get it, and she ceases to be loved. God was cruel when he made women."

Denner was used to such outbursts as this. Her

mistress's rhetoric and temper belonged to her superior rank, her grand person, and her piercing black eyes. Mrs Transome had a sense of impiety in her words which made them all the more tempting to her impotent anger. The waiting-woman had none of that awe which could be turned into defiance: the Sacred Grove was a common thicket to her.

"It mayn't be good-luck to be a woman," she said. "But one begins with it from a baby: one gets used to it. And I shouldn't like to be a man —to cough so loud, and stand straddling about on a wet day, and be so wasteful with meat and drink. They're a coarse lot, I think. Then I needn't make a trouble of this young lady, madam," she added, after a moment's pause.

"No, Denner. I like her. If that were all—I should like Harold to marry her. It would be the best thing. If the truth were known—and it will be known soon—the estate is hers by law—such law as it is. It's a strange story: she's a Bycliffe really."

Denner did not look amazed, but went on fastening her mistress's dress, as she said,

"Well, madam, I was sure there was something wonderful at the bottom of it. And turning the old lawsuits and everything else over in my mind, I

thought the law might have something to do with it. Then she is a born lady?"

"Yes; she has good blood in her veins."

"We talked that over in the housekeeper's room —what a hand and an instep she has, and how her head is set on her shoulders—almost like your own, madam. But her lightish complexion spoils her, to my thinking. And Dominic said Mr Harold never admired that sort of woman before. There's nothing that smooth fellow couldn't tell you if he would: he knows the answers to riddles before they're made. However, he knows how to hold his tongue; I'll say that for him. And so do I, madam."

"Yes, yes; you will not talk of it till other people are talking of it."

"And so, if Mr Harold married her, it would save all fuss and mischief?"

"Yes—about the estate."

"And he seems inclined; and she'll not refuse him, I'll answer for it. And you like her, madam. There's everything to set your mind at rest."

Denner was putting the finishing-touch to Mrs Transome's dress by throwing an Indian scarf over her shoulders, and so completing the contrast between the majestic lady in costume and the dis-

hevelled Hecuba-like woman whom she had found half an hour before.

"I am not at rest!" Mrs Transome said, with slow distinctness, moving from the mirror to the window, where the blind was not drawn down, and she could see the chill white landscape and the far-off unheeding stars.

Denner, more distressed by her mistress's suffering than she could have been by anything else, took up with the instinct of affection a gold vinaigrette which Mrs Transome often liked to carry with her, and going up to her put it into her hand gently. Mrs Transome grasped the little woman's hand hard, and held it so.

"Denner," she said, in a low tone, "if I could choose at this moment, I would choose that Harold should never have been born."

"Nay, my dear" (Denner had only once before in her life said "my dear" to her mistress), "it was a happiness to you then."

"I don't believe I felt the happiness then as I feel the misery now. It is foolish to say people can't feel much when they are getting old. Not pleasure, perhaps—little comes. But they can feel they are forsaken—why, every fibre in me seems to be a memory that makes a pang. They can feel

that all the love in their lives is turned to hatred or contempt."

"Not mine, madam, not mine. Let what would be, I should want to live for your sake, for fear you should have nobody to do for you as I would."

"Ah, then, you are a happy woman, Denner; you have loved somebody for forty years who is old and weak now, and can't do without you."

The sound of the dinner-gong resounded below, and Mrs Transome let the faithful hand fall again.

CHAPTER XL.

"She's beautiful; and therefore to be wooed:
She is a woman; therefore to be won."—*Henry VI.*

If Denner had had a suspicion that Esther's presence at Transome Court was not agreeable to her mistress, it was impossible to entertain such a suspicion with regard to the other members of the family. Between her and little Harry there was an extraordinary fascination. This creature, with the soft broad brown cheeks, low forehead, great black eyes, tiny well-defined nose, fierce biting tricks towards every person and thing he disliked, and insistance on entirely occupying those he liked, was a human specimen such as Esther had never seen before, and she seemed to be equally original in Harry's experience. At first sight her light complexion and her blue gown, probably also her sunny smile and her hands stretched out towards him, seemed to make a show for him as of a new

sort of bird: he threw himself backward against his "Gappa," as he called old Mr Transome, and stared at this new-comer with the gravity of a wild animal. But she had no sooner sat down on the sofa in the library than he climbed up to her, and began to treat her as an attractive object in natural history, snatched up her curls with his brown fist, and, discovering that there was a little ear under them, pinched it and blew into it, pulled at her coronet of plaits, and seemed to discover with satisfaction that it did not grow at the summit of her head, but could be dragged down and altogether undone. Then finding that she laughed, tossed him back, kissed, and pretended to bite him—in fact, was an animal that understood fun — he rushed off and made Dominic bring a small menagerie of white-mice, squirrels, and birds, with Moro, the black spaniel, to make her acquaintance. Whomsoever Harry liked, it followed that Mr Transome must like: "Gappa," along with Nimrod the retriever, was part of the menagerie, and perhaps endured more than all the other live creatures in the way of being tumbled about. Seeing that Esther bore having her hair pulled down quite merrily, and that she was willing to be harnessed and beaten, the old man began to confide to her, in his feeble, smiling, and

rather jerking fashion, Harry's remarkable feats: how he had one day, when Gappa was asleep, unpinned a whole drawerful of beetles, to see if they would fly away; then, disgusted with their stupidity, was about to throw them all on the ground and stamp on them, when Dominic came in and rescued these valuable specimens; also, how he had subtly watched Mrs Transome at the cabinet where she kept her medicines, and, when she had left it for a little while without locking it, had gone to the drawers and scattered half the contents on the floor. But what old Mr Transome thought the most wonderful proof of an almost preternatural cleverness was, that Harry would hardly ever talk, but preferred making inarticulate noises, or combining syllables after a method of his own.

"He can talk well enough if he likes," said Gappa, evidently thinking that Harry, like the monkeys, had deep reasons for his reticence.

"You mind him," he added, nodding at Esther, and shaking with low-toned laughter. "You'll hear: he knows the right names of things well enough, but he likes to make his own. He'll give you one all to yourself before long."

And when Harry seemed to have made up his mind distinctly that Esther's name was "Boo," Mr

Transome nodded at her with triumphant satisfaction, and then told her in a low whisper, looking round cautiously beforehand, that Harry would never call Mrs Transome "Gamma," but always "Bite."

"It's wonderful!" said he, laughing slyly.

The old man seemed so happy now in the new world created for him by Dominic and Harry, that he would perhaps have made a holocaust of his flies and beetles if it had been necessary in order to keep this living, lively kindness about him. He no longer confined himself to the library, but shuffled along from room to room, staying and looking on at what was going forward wherever he did not find Mrs Transome alone.

To Esther the sight of this feeble-minded, timid, paralytic man, who had long abdicated all mastery over the things that were his, was something piteous. Certainly this had never been part of the furniture she had imagined for the delightful aristocratic dwelling in her Utopia; and the sad irony of such a lot impressed her the more because in her father she was accustomed to age accompanied with mental acumen and activity. Her thoughts went back in conjecture over the past life of Mr and Mrs Transome, a couple so strangely different from

each other. She found it impossible to arrange their existence in the seclusion of this fine park and in this lofty large-roomed house, where it seemed quite ridiculous to be anything so small as a human being, without finding it rather dull. Mr Transome had always had his beetles, but Mrs Transome——? It was not easy to conceive that the husband and wife had ever been very fond of each other.

Esther felt at her ease with Mrs Transome: she was gratified by the consciousness—for on this point Esther was very quick—that Mrs Transome admired her, and looked at her with satisfied eyes. But when they were together in the early days of her stay, the conversation turned chiefly on what happened in Mrs Transome's youth—what she wore when she was presented at Court—who were the most distinguished and beautiful women at that time — the terrible excitement of the French Revolution — the emigrants she had known, and the history of various titled members of the Lingon family. And Esther, from native delicacy, did not lead to more recent topics of a personal kind. She was copiously instructed that the Lingon family was better than that even of the elder Transomes, and was privileged with an explanation of the various quarter-

ings, which proved that the Lingon blood had been continually enriched. Poor Mrs Transome, with her secret bitterness and dread, still found a flavour in this sort of pride; none the less because certain deeds of her own life had been in fatal inconsistency with it. Besides, genealogies entered into her stock of ideas, and her talk on such subjects was as necessary as the notes of the linnet or the blackbird. She had no ultimate analysis of things that went beyond blood and family—the Herons of Fenshore or the Badgers of Hillbury. She had never seen behind the canvass with which her life was hung. In the dim background there was the burning mount and the tables of the law; in the foreground there was Lady Debarry privately gossiping about her, and Lady Wyvern finally deciding not to send her invitations to dinner. Unlike that Semiramis who made laws to suit her practical licence, she lived, poor soul, in the midst of desecrated sanctities, and of honours that looked tarnished in the light of monotonous and weary suns. Glimpses of the Lingon heraldry in their freshness were interesting to Esther; but it occurred to her that when she had known about them a good while they would cease to be succulent themes of converse or meditation, and Mrs Transome, having known

them all along, might have felt a vacuum in spite of them.

Nevertheless it was entertaining at present to be seated on soft cushions with her netting before her, while Mrs Transome went on with her embroidery, and told in that easy phrase, and with that refined high-bred tone and accent which she possessed in perfection, family stories that to Esther were like so many novellettes: what diamonds were in the Earl's family, own cousins to Mrs Transome; how poor Lady Sara's husband went off into jealous madness only a month after their marriage, and dragged that sweet blue-eyed thing by the hair; and how the brilliant Fanny, having married a country parson, became so niggardly that she had gone about almost begging for fresh eggs from the farmers' wives, though she had done very well with her six sons, as there was a bishop and no end of interest in the family, and two of them got appointments in India.

At present Mrs Transome did not touch at all on her own time of privation, or her troubles with her eldest son, or on anything that lay very close to her heart. She conversed with Esther, and acted the part of hostess as she performed her toilette and went on with her embroidery: these things were

to be done whether one were happy or miserable. Even the patriarch Job, if he had been a gentleman of the modern West, would have avoided picturesque disorder and poetical laments; and the friends who called on him, though not less disposed than Bildad the Shuhite to hint that their unfortunate friend was in the wrong, would have sat on chairs and held their hats in their hands. The harder problems of our life have changed less than our manners; we wrestle with the old sorrows, but more decorously. Esther's inexperience prevented her from divining much about this fine grey-haired woman, whom she could not help perceiving to stand apart from the family group, as if there were some cause of isolation for her both within and without. To her young heart there was a peculiar interest in Mrs Transome. An elderly woman, whose beauty, position, and graceful kindness towards herself, made deference to her spontaneous, was a new figure in Esther's experience. Her quick light movement was always ready to anticipate what Mrs Transome wanted; her bright apprehension and silvery speech were always ready to cap Mrs Transome's narratives or instructions even about doses and liniments, with some lively commentary. She must have behaved charmingly; for one day when she had tripped

across the room to put the screen just in the right place, Mrs Transome said, taking her hand, "My dear, you make me wish I had a daughter!"

That was pleasant; and so it was to be decked by Mrs Transome's own hands in a set of turquoise ornaments, which became her wonderfully, worn with a white Cashmere dress, which was also insisted on. Esther never reflected that there was a double intention in these pretty ways towards her; with young generosity, she was rather preoccupied by the desire to prove that she herself entertained no low triumph in the fact that she had rights prejudicial to this family whose life she was learning. And besides, through all Mrs Transome's perfect manners there pierced some indefinable indications of a hidden anxiety much deeper than anything she could feel about this affair of the estate—to which she often alluded slightly as a reason for informing Esther of something. It was impossible to mistake her for a happy woman; and young speculation is always stirred by discontent for which there is no obvious cause. When we are older, we take the uneasy eyes and the bitter lips more as a matter of course.

But Harold Transome was more communicative about recent years than his mother was. He

thought it well that Esther should know how the fortune of his family had been drained by law expenses, owing to suits mistakenly urged by her family; he spoke of his mother's lonely life and pinched circumstances, of her lack of comfort in her elder son, and of the habit she had consequently acquired of looking at the gloomy side of things. He hinted that she had been accustomed to dictate, and that, as he had left her when he was a boy, she had perhaps indulged the dream that he would come back a boy. She was still sore on the point of his politics. These things could not be helped, but, so far as he could, he wished to make the rest of her life as cheerful as possible.

Esther listened eagerly, and took these things to heart. The claim to an inheritance, the sudden discovery of a right to a fortune held by others, was acquiring a very distinct and unexpected meaning for her. Every day she was getting more clearly into her imagination what it would be to abandon her own past, and what she would enter into in exchange for it; what it would be to disturb a long possession, and how difficult it was to fix a point at which the disturbance might begin, so as to be contemplated without pain.

Harold Transome's thoughts turned on the same

subject, but accompanied by a different state of feeling and with more definite resolutions. He saw a mode of reconciling all difficulties, which looked pleasanter to him the longer he looked at Esther. When she had been hardly a week in the house, he had made up his mind to marry her; and it had never entered into that mind that the decision did not rest entirely with his inclination. It was not that he thought slightly of Esther's demands; he saw that she would require considerable attractions to please her, and that there were difficulties to be overcome. She was clearly a girl who must be wooed; but Harold did not despair of presenting the requisite attractions, and the difficulties gave more interest to the wooing than he could have believed. When he had said that he would not marry an Englishwoman, he had always made a mental reservation in favour of peculiar circumstances; and now the peculiar circumstances were come. To be deeply in love was a catastrophe not likely to happen to him; but he was readily amorous. No woman could make him miserable, but he was sensitive to the presence of women, and was kind to them; not with grimaces, like a man of mere gallantry, but beamingly, easily, like a man of genuine good-nature.

And each day that he was near Esther, the solution of all difficulties by marriage became a more pleasing prospect; though he had to confess to himself that the difficulties did not diminish on a nearer view, in spite of the flattering sense that she brightened at his approach.

Harold was not one to fail in a purpose for want of assiduity. After an hour or two devoted to business in the morning, he went to look for Esther, and if he did not find her at play with Harry and old Mr Transome, or chatting with his mother, he went into the drawing-room, where she was usually either seated with a book on her knee and "making a bed for her cheek" with one little hand, while she looked out of the window, or else standing in front of one of the full-length family portraits with an air of rumination. Esther found it impossible to read in these days; her life was a book which she seemed herself to be constructing—trying to make character clear before her, and looking into the ways of destiny.

The active Harold had almost always something definite to propose by way of filling the time: if it were fine, she must walk out with him and see the grounds; and when the snow melted and it was no longer slippery, she must get on horseback and learn

to ride. If they stayed indoors, she must learn to play at billiards, or she must go over the house and see the pictures he had had hung anew, or the costumes he had brought from the East, or come into his study and look at the map of the estate, and hear what—if it had remained in his family—he had intended to do in every corner of it in order to make the most of its capabilities.

About a certain time in the morning Esther had learned to expect him. Let every wooer make himself strongly expected; he may succeed by dint of being absent, but hardly in the first instance. One morning Harold found her in the drawing-room, leaning against a consol table, and looking at the full-length portrait of a certain Lady Betty Transome, who had lived a century and a half before, and had the usual charm of ladies in Sir Peter Lely's style.

"Don't move, pray," he said on entering; "you look as if you were standing for your own portrait."

"I take that as an insinuation," said Esther, laughing, and moving towards her seat on an ottoman near the fire, "for I notice almost all the portraits are in a conscious, affected attitude. That fair Lady Betty looks as if she had been drilled into that posture, and had not will enough of her

own ever to move again unless she had a little push given to her."

"She brightens up that panel well with her long satin skirt," said Harold, as he followed Esther, "but alive I daresay she would have been less cheerful company."

"One would certainly think that she had just been unpacked from silver paper. Ah, how chivalrous you are!" said Esther, as Harold, kneeling on one knee, held her silken netting-stirrup for her to put her foot through. She had often fancied pleasant scenes in which such homage was rendered to her, and the homage was not disagreeable now it was really come; but, strangely enough, a little darting sensation at that moment was accompanied by the vivid remembrance of some one who had never paid the least attention to her foot. There had been a slight blush, such as often came and went rapidly, and she was silent a moment. Harold naturally believed that it was he himself who was filling the field of vision. He would have liked to place himself on the ottoman near Esther, and behave very much more like a lover; but he took a chair opposite to her at a circumspect distance. He dared not do otherwise. Along with Esther's playful charm she conveyed an impression

of personal pride and high spirit which warned Harold's acuteness that in the delicacy of their present position he might easily make a false move and offend her. A woman was likely to be credulous about adoration, and to find no difficulty in referring it to her intrinsic attractions; but Esther was too dangerously quick and critical not to discern the least awkwardness that looked like offering her marriage as a convenient compromise for himself. Beforehand, he might have said that such characteristics as hers were not lovable in a woman; but, as it was, he found that the hope of pleasing her had a piquancy quite new to him.

"I wonder," said Esther, breaking her silence in her usual light silvery tones—"I wonder whether the women who looked in that way ever felt any troubles. I see there are two old ones up-stairs in the billiard-room who have only got fat; the expression of their faces is just of the same sort."

"A woman ought never to have any trouble. There should always be a man to guard her from it." (Harold Transome was masculine and fallible; he had incautiously sat down this morning to pay his addresses by talk about nothing in particular; and, clever experienced man as he was, he fell into nonsense.)

"But suppose the man himself got into trouble—you would wish her to mind about that. Or suppose," added Esther, suddenly looking up merrily at Harold, "the man himself was troublesome?"

"O you must not strain probabilities in that way. The generality of men are perfect. Take me, for example."

"You are a perfect judge of sauces," said Esther, who had her triumphs in letting Harold know that she was capable of taking notes.

"That is perfection number one. Pray go on."

"O, the catalogue is too long—I should be tired before I got to your magnificent ruby ring and your gloves always of the right colour."

"If you would let me tell you your perfections, I should not be tired."

"That is not complimentary; it means that the list is short."

"No; it means that the list is pleasant to dwell upon."

"Pray don't begin," said Esther, with her pretty toss of the head; "it would be dangerous to our good understanding. The person I liked best in the world was one who did nothing but scold me and tell me of my faults."

When Esther began to speak, she meant to do no

more than make a remote unintelligible allusion, feeling, it must be owned, a naughty will to flirt and be saucy, and thwart Harold's attempts to be felicitous in compliment. But she had no sooner uttered the words than they seemed to her like a confession. A deep flush spread itself over her face and neck, and the sense that she was blushing went on deepening her colour. Harold felt himself unpleasantly illuminated as to a possibility that had never yet occurred to him. His surprise made an uncomfortable pause, in which Esther had time to feel much vexation.

"You speak in the past tense," said Harold, at last; "yet I am rather envious of that person. I shall never be able to win your regard in the same way. Is it any one at Treby? Because in that case I can inquire about your faults."

"O you know I have always lived among grave people," said Esther, more able to recover herself now she was spoken to. "Before I came home to be with my father I was nothing but a school-girl first, and then a teacher in different stages of growth. People in those circumstances are not usually flattered. But there are varieties in fault-finding. At our Paris school the master I liked best was an old man who stormed at me terribly

when I read Racine, but yet showed that he was proud of me."

Esther was getting quite cool again. But Harold was not entirely satisfied; if there was any obstacle in his way, he wished to know exactly what it was.

"That must have been a wretched life for you at Treby," he said,—"a person of your accomplishments."

"I used to be dreadfully discontented," said Esther, much occupied with mistakes she had made in her netting. "But I was becoming less so. I have had time to get rather wise, you know; I am two-and-twenty."

"Yes," said Harold, rising and walking a few paces backwards and forwards, "you are past your majority; you are empress of your own fortunes—and more besides."

"Dear me," said Esther, letting her work fall, and leaning back against the cushions; "I don't think I know very well what to do with my empire."

"Well," said Harold, pausing in front of her, leaning one arm on the mantelpiece, and speaking very gravely, "I hope that in any case, since you appear to have no near relative who understands affairs, you will confide in me, and trust me with all your intentions as if I had no other personal

concern in the matter than a regard for you. I hope you believe me capable of acting as the guardian of your interest, even where it turns out to be inevitably opposed to my own."

"I am sure you have given me reason to believe it," said Esther, with seriousness, putting out her hand to Harold. She had not been left in ignorance that he had had opportunities twice offered of stifling her claims.

Harold raised the hand to his lips, but dared not retain it more than an instant. Still the sweet reliance in Esther's manner made an irresistible temptation to him. After standing still a moment or two, while she bent over her work, he glided to the ottoman and seated himself close by her, looking at her busy hands.

"I see you have made mistakes in your work," he said, bending still nearer, for he saw that she was conscious, yet not angry.

"Nonsense! you know nothing about it," said Esther, laughing, and crushing up the soft silk under her palms. "Those blunders have a design in them."

She looked round, and saw a handsome face very near her. Harold was looking, as he felt, thoroughly enamoured of this bright woman, who was not at

all to his preconceived taste. Perhaps a touch of hypothetic jealousy now helped to heighten the effect. But he mastered all indiscretion, and only looked at her as he said,

"I am wondering whether you have any deep wishes and secrets that I can't guess."

"Pray don't speak of my wishes," said Esther, quite overmastered by this new and apparently involuntary manifestation in Harold; "I could not possibly tell you one at this moment—I think I shall never find them out again. O yes," she said, abruptly, struggling to relieve herself from the oppression of unintelligible feelings—"I do know one wish distinctly. I want to go and see my father. He writes me word that all is well with him, but still I want to see him."

"You shall be driven there when you like."

"May I go now—I mean as soon as it is convenient?" said Esther, rising.

"I will give the order immediately, if you wish it," said Harold, understanding that the audience was broken up.

CHAPTER XLI.

He rates me as a merchant does the wares
He will not purchase—"quality not high!—
'Twill lose its colour opened to the sun,
Has no aroma, and, in fine, is naught—
I barter not for such commodities—
There is no ratio betwixt sand and gems."
'Tis wicked judgment! for the soul can grow,
As embryos, that live and move but blindly,
Burst from the dark, emerge regenerate,
And lead a life of vision and of choice.

ESTHER did not take the carriage into Malthouse Lane, but left it to wait for her outside the town; and when she entered the house she put her finger on her lip to Lyddy and ran lightly up-stairs. She wished to surprise her father by this visit, and she succeeded. The little minister was just then almost surrounded by a wall of books, with merely his head peeping above them, being much embarrassed to find a substitute for tables and desks on which to arrange the volumes he kept open for reference. He was absorbed in mastering all those painstaking interpretations of the Book of Daniel, which are by

this time well gone to the limbo of mistaken criticism; and Esther, as she opened the door softly, heard him rehearsing aloud a passage in which he declared, with some parenthetic provisoes, that he conceived not how a perverse ingenuity could blunt the edge of prophetic explicitness, or how an open mind could fail to see in the chronology of "the little horn" the resplendent lamp of an inspired symbol searching out the germinal growth of an antichristian power.

"You will not like me to interrupt you, father?" said Esther, slyly.

"Ah, my beloved child!" he exclaimed, upsetting a pile of books, and thus unintentionally making a convenient breach in his wall, through which Esther could get up to him and kiss him. "Thy appearing is as a joy despaired of. I had thought of thee as the blinded think of the daylight—which indeed is a thing to rejoice in, like all other good, though we see it not nigh."

"Are you sure you have been as well and comfortable as you said you were in your letters?" said Esther, seating herself close in front of her father, and laying her hand on his shoulder.

"I wrote truly, my dear, according to my knowledge at the time. But to an old memory like

mine the present days are but as a little water poured on the deep. It seems now that all has been as usual, except my studies, which have gone somewhat curiously into prophetic history. But I fear you will rebuke me for my negligent apparel," said the little man, feeling in front of Esther's brightness like a bat overtaken by the morning.

"That is Lyddy's fault, who sits crying over her want of Christian assurance instead of brushing your clothes and putting out your clean cravat. She is always saying her righteousness is filthy rags, and really I don't think that is a very strong expression for it. I'm sure it is dusty clothes and furniture."

"Nay, my dear, your playfulness glances too severely on our faithful Lyddy. Doubtless I am myself deficient, in that I do not aid her infirm memory by admonition. But now tell me aught that you have left untold about yourself. Your heart has gone out somewhat towards this family—the old man and the child, whom I had not reckoned of?"

"Yes, father. It is more and more difficult to me to see how I can make up my mind to disturb these people at all."

"Something should doubtless be devised to lighten

the loss and the change to the aged father and mother. I would have you in any case seek to temper a vicissitude, which is nevertheless a providential arrangement not to be wholly set aside."

"Do you think, father—do you feel assured that a case of inheritance like this of mine is a sort of providential arrangement that makes a command?"

"I have so held it," said Mr Lyon, solemnly; "in all my meditations I have so held it. For you have to consider, my dear, that you have been led by a peculiar path, and into experience which is not ordinarily the lot of those who are seated in high places; and what I have hinted to you already in my letters on this head, I shall wish on a future opportunity to enter into more at large."

Esther was uneasily silent. On this great question of her lot she saw doubts and difficulties, in which it seemed as if her father could not help her. There was no illumination for her in this theory of providential arrangement. She said suddenly (what she had not thought of at all suddenly),

"Have you been again to see Felix Holt, father? You have not mentioned him in your letters."

"I have been since I last wrote, my dear, and

I took his mother with me, who, I fear, made the time heavy to him with her plaints. But afterwards I carried her away to the house of a brother minister at Loamford, and returned to Felix, and then we had much discourse."

"Did you tell him of everything that has happened—I mean about me—about the Transomes?"

"Assuredly I told him, and he listened as one astonished. For he had much to hear, knowing nought of your birth, and that you had any other father than Rufus Lyon. 'Tis a narrative I trust I shall not be called on to give to others; but I was not without satisfaction in unfolding the truth to this young man, who hath wrought himself into my affection strangely—I would fain hope for ends that will be a visible good in his less way-worn life, when mine shall be no longer."

"And you told him how the Transomes had come, and that I was staying at Transome Court?"

"Yes, I told these things with some particularity, as is my wont concerning what hath imprinted itself on my mind."

"What did Felix say?"

"Truly, my dear, nothing desirable to recite," said Mr Lyon, rubbing his hand over his brow.

"Dear father, he did say something, and you

always remember what people say. Pray tell me; I want to know."

"It was a hasty remark, and rather escaped him than was consciously framed. He said, 'Then she will marry Transome; that is what Transome means.'"

"That was all?" said Esther, turning rather pale, and biting her lip with the determination that the tears should not start.

"Yes, we did not go further into that branch of the subject. I apprehend there is no warrant for his seeming prognostic, and I should not be without disquiet if I thought otherwise. For I confess that in your accession to this great position and property, I contemplate with hopeful satisfaction your remaining attached to that body of congregational Dissent, which, as I hold, hath retained most of pure and primitive discipline. Your education and peculiar history would thus be seen to have coincided with a long train of events in making this family property a mean of honouring and illustrating a purer form of Christianity than that which hath unhappily obtained the pre-eminence in this land. I speak, my child, as you know, always in the hope that you will fully join our communion; and this dear wish of my heart—nay,

this urgent prayer—would seem to be frustrated by your marriage with a man, of whom there is at least no visible indication that he would unite himself to our body."

If Esther had been less agitated, she would hardly have helped smiling at the picture her father's words suggested of Harold Transome "joining the church" in Malthouse Yard. But she was too seriously preoccupied with what Felix had said, which hurt her in a two-edged fashion that was highly significant. First, she was angry with him for daring to say positively whom she would marry; secondly, she was angry at the implication that there was from the first a cool deliberate design in Harold Transome to marry her. Esther said to herself that she was quite capable of discerning Harold Transome's disposition, and judging of his conduct. She felt sure he was generous and open. It did not lower him in her opinion that since circumstances had brought them together he evidently admired her—was in love with her—in short, desired to marry her; and she thought that she discerned the delicacy which hindered him from being more explicit. There is no point on which young women are more easily piqued than this of their sufficiency to judge the men who

make love to them. And Esther's generous nature delighted to believe in generosity. All these thoughts were making a tumult in her mind while her father was suggesting the radiance her lot might cast on the cause of congregational Dissent. She heard what he said, and remembered it afterwards, but she made no reply at present, and chose rather to start up in search of a brush—an action which would seem to her father quite a usual sequence with her. It served the purpose of diverting him from a lengthy subject.

"Have you yet spoken with Mr Transome concerning Mistress Holt, my dear?" he said, as Esther was moving about the room. "I hinted to him that you would best decide how assistance should be tendered to her."

"No, father, we have not approached the subject. Mr Transome may have forgotten it, and, for several reasons, I would rather not talk of this—of money matters to him at present. There is money due to me from the Lukyns and the Pendrells."

"They have paid it," said Mr Lyon, opening his desk. "I have it here ready to deliver to you."

"Keep it, father, and pay Mrs Holt's rent with it, and do anything else that is wanted for her. We must consider everything temporary now," said

Esther, enveloping her father in a towel, and beginning to brush his auburn fringe of hair, while he shut his eyes in preparation for this pleasant passivity. "Everything is uncertain—what may become of Felix — what may become of us all. O dear!" she went on, changing suddenly to laughing merriment, "I am beginning to talk like Lyddy, I think."

"Truly," said Mr Lyon, smiling, "the uncertainty of things is a text rather too wide and obvious for fruitful application; and to discourse of it is, as one may say, to bottle up the air, and make a present of it to those who are already standing out of doors."

"Do you think," said Esther, in the course of their chat, "that the Treby people know at all about the reasons of my being at Transome Court?"

"I have had no sign thereof; and indeed there is no one, as it appears, who could make the story public. The man Christian is away in London with Mr Debarry, Parliament now beginning; and Mr Jermyn would doubtless respect the confidence of the Transomes. I have not seen him lately. I know nothing of his movements. And so far as my own speech is concerned, and my strict command to Lyddy, I have withheld the means of information even as to your having returned to Transome Court

in the carriage, not wishing to give any occasion to solicitous questioning till time hath somewhat inured me. But it hath got abroad that you are there, and is the subject of conjectures, whereof, I imagine, the chief is, that you are gone as companion to Mistress Transome; for some of our friends have already hinted a rebuke to me that I should permit your taking a position so little likely to further your spiritual welfare."

"Now, father, I think I shall be obliged to run away from you, not to keep the carriage too long," said Esther, as she finished her reforms in the minister's toilette. "You look beautiful now, and I must give Lyddy a little lecture before I go."

"Yes, my dear; I would not detain you, seeing that my duties demand me. But take with you this Treatise, which I have purposely selected. It concerns all the main questions between ourselves and the Establishment — government, discipline, State-support. It is seasonable that you should give a nearer attention to these polemics, lest you be drawn aside by the fallacious association of a State Church with elevated rank."

Esther chose to take the volume submissively, rather than to adopt the ungraceful sincerity of saying that she was unable at present to give her mind

to the original functions of a bishop, or the comparative merit of Endowments and Voluntaryism. But she did not run her eyes over the pages during her solitary drive to get a foretaste of the argument, for she was entirely occupied with Felix Holt's prophecy that she would marry Harold Transome.

CHAPTER XLII.

Thou sayst it, and not I; for thou hast done
The ugly deed that made these ugly words.
SOPHOCLES: *Electra.*

Yea, it becomes a man
To cherish memory, where he had delight.
For kindness is the natural birth of kindness.
Whose soul records not the great debt of joy,
Is stamped for ever an ignoble man.
SOPHOCLES: *Ajax.*

IT so happened that, on the morning of the day when Esther went to see her father, Jermyn had not yet heard of her presence at Transome Court. One fact conducing to keep him in this ignorance was, that some days after his critical interview with Harold—days during which he had been wondering how long it would be before Harold made up his mind to sacrifice the luxury of satisfied anger for the solid advantage of securing fortune and position—he was peremptorily called away by business to the south of England, and was obliged to inform Harold by letter of his absence. He took care also to notify his return; but Harold made no sign in reply. The

days passed without bringing him any gossip concerning Esther's visit, for such gossip was almost confined to Mr Lyon's congregation, her Church pupils, Miss Louisa Jermyn among them, having been satisfied by her father's written statement that she was gone on a visit of uncertain duration. But on this day of Esther's call in Malthouse Yard, the Miss Jermyns in their walk saw her getting into the Transomes' carriage, which they had previously observed to be waiting, and which they now saw bowled along on the road towards Little Treby. It followed that only a few hours later the news reached the astonished ears of Matthew Jermyn.

Entirely ignorant of those converging indications and small links of incident which had raised Christian's conjectures, and had gradually contributed to put him in possession of the facts; ignorant too of some busy motives in the mind of his obliged servant Johnson; Jermyn was not likely to see at once how the momentous information that Esther was the surviving Bycliffe could possibly have reached Harold. His daughters naturally leaped, as others had done, to the conclusion that the Transomes, seeking a governess for little Harry, had had their choice directed to Esther, and observed that they must have attracted her by a high salary to induce

her to take charge of such a small pupil; though of course it was important that his English and French should be carefully attended to from the first. Jermyn, hearing this suggestion, was not without a momentary hope that it might be true, and that Harold was still safely unconscious of having under the same roof with him the legal claimant of the family estate.

But a mind in the grasp of a terrible anxiety is not credulous of easy solutions. The one stay that bears up our hopes is sure to appear frail, and if looked at long will seem to totter. Too much depended on that unconsciousness of Harold's; and although Jermyn did not see the course of things that could have disclosed and combined the various items of knowledge which he had imagined to be his own secret, and therefore his safeguard, he saw quite clearly what was likely to be the result of the disclosure. Not only would Harold Transome be no longer afraid of him, but also, by marrying Esther (and Jermyn at once felt sure of this issue), he would be triumphantly freed from any unpleasant consequences, and could pursue much at his ease the gratification of ruining Matthew Jermyn. The prevision of an enemy's triumphant ease is in any case sufficiently irritating to hatred, and there

were reasons why it was peculiarly exasperating here; but Jermyn had not the leisure now for mere fruitless emotion: he had to think of a possible device which might save him from imminent ruin —not an indefinite adversity, but a ruin in detail, which his thoughts painted out with the sharpest, ugliest intensity. A man of sixty, with an unsuspicious wife and daughters capable of shrieking and fainting at a sudden revelation, and of looking at him reproachfully in their daily misery under a shabby lot to which he had reduced them—with a mind and with habits dried hard by the years—with no glimpse of an endurable standing-ground except where he could domineer and be prosperous according to the ambitions of pushing middle-class gentility,—such a man is likely to find the prospect of worldly ruin ghastly enough to drive him to the most uninviting means of escape. He will probably prefer any private scorn that will save him from public infamy or that will leave him money in his pocket, to the humiliation and hardship of new servitude in old age, a shabby hat, and a melancholy hearth, where the firing must be used charily and the women look sad. But though a man may be willing to escape through a sewer, a sewer with an outlet into the dry air is

not always at hand. Running away, especially when spoken of as absconding, seems at a distance to offer a good modern substitute for the right of sanctuary; but seen closely, it is often found inconvenient and scarcely possible.

Jermyn, on thoroughly considering his position, saw that he had no very agreeable resources at command. But he soon made up his mind what he would do next. He wrote to Mrs Transome requesting her to appoint an hour in which he could see her privately: he knew she would understand that it was to be an hour when Harold was not at home. As he sealed the letter, he indulged a faint hope that in this interview he might be assured of Esther's birth being unknown at Transome Court; but in the worst case, perhaps some help might be found in Mrs Transome. To such uses may tender relations come when they have ceased to be tender! The Hazaels of our world who are pushed on quickly against their preconceived confidence in themselves to do doglike actions by the sudden suggestion of a wicked ambition, are much fewer than those who are led on through the years by the gradual demands of a selfishness which has spread its fibres far and wide through the intricate vanities and sordid cares of an everyday existence.

In consequence of that letter to Mrs Transome, Jermyn was two days afterwards ushered into the smaller drawing-room at Transome Court. It was a charming little room in its refurbished condition: it had two pretty inlaid cabinets, great china vases with contents that sent forth odours of paradise, groups of flowers in oval frames on the walls, and Mrs Transome's own portrait in the evening costume of 1800, with a garden in the background. That brilliant young woman looked smilingly down on Mr Jermyn as he passed in front of the fire; and at present hers was the only gaze in the room. He could not help meeting the gaze as he waited, holding his hat behind him—could not help seeing many memories lit up by it; but the strong bent of his mind was to go on arguing each memory into a claim, and to see in the regard others had for him a merit of his own. There had been plenty of roads open to him when he was a young man; perhaps if he had not allowed himself to be determined (chiefly, of course, by the feelings of others, for of what effect would his own feelings have been without them?) into the road he actually took, he might have done better for himself. At any rate, he was likely at last to get the worst of it, and it was he who had most reason to complain. The fortunate

Jason, as we know from Euripides, piously thanked the goddess, and saw clearly that he was not at all obliged to Medea: Jermyn was perhaps not aware of the precedent, but thought out his own freedom from obligation and the indebtedness of others towards him with a native faculty not inferior to Jason's.

Before three minutes had passed, however, as if by some sorcery, the brilliant smiling young woman above the mantelpiece seemed to be appearing at the doorway withered and frosted by many winters, and with lips and eyes from which the smile had departed. Jermyn advanced, and they shook hands, but neither of them said anything by way of greeting. Mrs Transome seated herself, and pointed to a chair opposite and near her.

"Harold has gone to Loamford," she said, in a subdued tone. "You had something particular to say to me?"

"Yes," said Jermyn, with his soft and deferential air. "The last time I was here I could not take the opportunity of speaking to you. But I am anxious to know whether you are aware of what has passed between me and Harold?"

"Yes, he has told me everything."

"About his proceedings against me? and the reason he stopped them?"

"Yes: have you had notice that he has begun them again?"

"No," said Jermyn, with a very unpleasant sensation.

"Of course he will now," said Mrs Transome. "There is no reason in his mind why he should not."

"Has he resolved to risk the estate then?"

"He feels in no danger on that score. And if there were, the danger doesn't depend on you. The most likely thing is, that he will marry this girl."

"He knows everything then?" said Jermyn, the expression of his face getting clouded.

"Everything. It's of no use for you to think of mastering him: you can't do it. I used to wish Harold to be fortunate—and he is fortunate," said Mrs Transome, with intense bitterness. "It's not my star that he inherits."

"Do you know how he came by the information about this girl?"

"No; but she knew it all before we spoke to her. It's no secret."

Jermyn was confounded by this hopeless frustration to which he had no key. Though he thought of Christian, the thought shed no light; but the more fatal point was clear: he held no secret that could help him.

"You are aware that these Chancery proceedings may ruin me?"

"He told me they would. But if you are imagining that I can do anything, dismiss the notion. I have told him as plainly as I dare that I wish him to drop all public quarrel with you, and that you could make an arrangement without scandal. I can do no more. He will not listen to me; he doesn't mind about my feelings. He cares more for Mr Transome than he does for me. He will not listen to me any more than if I were an old ballad-singer."

"It's very hard on *me*, I know," said Jermyn, in the tone with which a man flings out a reproach.

"I besought you three months ago to bear anything rather than quarrel with him."

"I have not quarrelled with him. It is he who has been always seeking a quarrel with me. I have borne a good deal—more than any one else would. He set his teeth against me from the first."

"He saw things that annoyed him; and men are not like women," said Mrs Transome. There was a bitter innuendo in that truism.

"It's very hard on me—I know that," said Jermyn, with an intensification of his previous tone,

rising and walking a step or two, then turning and laying his hand on the back of the chair. "Of course the law in this case can't in the least represent the justice of the matter. I made a good many sacrifices in times past. I gave up a great deal of fine business for the sake of attending to the family affairs, and in that lawsuit they would have gone to rack and ruin if it hadn't been for me."

He moved away again, laid down his hat, which he had been previously holding, and thrust his hands into his pockets as he returned. Mrs Transome sat motionless as marble, and almost as pale. Her hands lay crossed on her knees. This man, young, slim, and graceful, with a selfishness which then took the form of homage to her, had at one time kneeled to her and kissed those hands fervently; and she had thought there was a poetry in such passion beyond any to be found in everyday domesticity.

"I stretched my conscience a good deal in that affair of Bycliffe, as you know perfectly well. I told you everything at the time. I told you I was very uneasy about those witnesses, and about getting him thrown into prison. I know it's the blackest thing anybody could charge me with, if

they knew my life from beginning to end; and I should never have done it, if I had not been under an infatuation such as makes a man do anything. What did it signify to me about the loss of the lawsuit? I was a young bachelor—I had the world before me."

"Yes," said Mrs Transome, in a low tone. "It was a pity you didn't make another choice."

"What would have become of you?" said Jermyn, carried along a climax, like other self-justifiers. "I had to think of you. You would not have liked me to make another choice then."

"Clearly," said Mrs Transome, with concentrated bitterness, but still quietly; "the greater mistake was mine."

Egoism is usually stupid in a dialogue; but Jermyn's did not make him so stupid that he did not feel the edge of Mrs Transome's words. They increased his irritation.

"I hardly see that," he replied, with a slight laugh of scorn. "You had an estate and a position to save, to go no farther. I remember very well what you said to me—'A clever lawyer can do anything if he has the will; if it's impossible, he will make it possible. And the property is sure to be Harold's some day.' He was a baby then."

"I remember most things a little too well: you had better say at once what is your object in recalling them."

"An object that is nothing more than justice. With the relation I stood in, it was not likely I should think myself bound by all the forms that are made to bind strangers. I had often immense trouble to raise the money necessary to pay off debts and carry on the affairs; and, as I said before, I had given up other lines of advancement which would have been open to me if I had not stayed in this neighbourhood at a critical time when I was fresh to the world. Anybody who knew the whole circumstances would say that my being hunted and run down on the score of my past transactions with regard to the family affairs, is an abominably unjust and unnatural thing."

Jermyn paused a moment, and then added, "At my time of life . . . and with a family about me —and after what has passed . . . I should have thought there was nothing you would care more to prevent."

"I do care. It makes me miserable. That is the extent of my power—to feel miserable."

"No, it is not the extent of your power. You could save me if you would. It is not to be sup-

posed that Harold would go on against me . . if he knew the whole truth."

Jermyn had sat down before he uttered the last words. He had lowered his voice slightly He had the air of one who thought that he had prepared the way for an understanding. That a man with so much sharpness, with so much suavity at command—a man who piqued himself on his persuasiveness towards women,—should behave just as Jermyn did on this occasion, would be surprising, but for the constant experience that temper and selfish insensibility will defeat excellent gifts—will make a sensible person shout when shouting is out of place, and will make a polished man rude when his polish might be of eminent use to him.

As Jermyn, sitting down and leaning forward with an elbow on his knee, uttered his last words—"if he knew the whole truth"—a slight shock seemed to pass through Mrs Transome's hitherto motionless body, followed by a sudden light in her eyes, as in an animal's about to spring.

"And you expect me to tell him?" she said, not loudly, but yet with a clear metallic ring in her voice.

"Would it not be right for him to know?" said Jermyn, in a more bland and persuasive tone than he had yet used.

Perhaps some of the most terrible irony of the human lot is this of a deep truth coming to be uttered by lips that have no right to it.

"I will never tell him!" said Mrs Transome, starting up, her whole frame thrilled with a passion that seemed almost to make her young again. Her hands hung beside her clenched tightly, her eyes and lips lost the helpless repressed bitterness of discontent, and seemed suddenly fed with energy. "You reckon up your sacrifices for me: you have kept a good account of them, and it is needful; they are some of them what no one else could guess or find out. But you made your sacrifices when they seemed pleasant to you; when you told me they were your happiness; when you told me that it was I who stooped, and I who bestowed favours."

Jermyn rose too, and laid his hand on the back of the chair. He had grown visibly paler, but seemed about to speak.

"Don't speak!" Mrs Transome said peremptorily. "Don't open your lips again. You have said enough; I will speak now. I have made sacrifices too, but it was when I knew that they were not my happiness. It was after I saw that I *had* stooped—after I saw that your tenderness had turned into calculation—after I saw that you cared for your-

self only, and not for me. I heard your explanations—of your duty in life—of our mutual reputation—of a virtuous young lady attached to you. I bore it; I let everything go; I shut my eyes; I might almost have let myself starve, rather than have scenes of quarrel with the man I had loved, in which I must accuse him of turning my love into a good bargain." There was a slight tremor in Mrs Transome's voice in the last words, and for a moment she paused; but when she spoke again it seemed as if the tremor had frozen into a cutting icicle. "I suppose if a lover picked one's pocket, there's no woman would like to own it. I don't say I was not afraid of you: I *was* afraid of you, and I know now I was right."

"Mrs Transome," said Jermyn, white to the lips, "it is needless to say more. I withdraw any words that have offended you."

"You can't withdraw them. Can a man apologise for being a dastard? And I have caused you to strain your conscience, have I?—it is I who have sullied your purity? I should think the demons have more honour—they are not so impudent to one another. I would not lose the misery of being a woman, now I see what can be the baseness of a man. One must be a man—first to tell a woman

that her love has made her your debtor, and then ask her to pay you by breaking the last poor threads between her and her son."

"I do not ask it," said Jermyn, with a certain asperity. He was beginning to find this intolerable. The mere brute strength of a masculine creature rebelled. He felt almost inclined to throttle the voice out of this woman.

"You do ask it: it is what you would like. I have had a terror on me lest evil should happen to you. From the first, after Harold came home, I had a horrible dread. It seemed as if murder might come between you—I didn't know what. I felt the horror of his not knowing the truth. I might have been dragged at last, by my own feeling—by my own memory—to tell him all, and make him as well as myself miserable, to save you."

Again there was a slight tremor, as if at the remembrance of womanly tenderness and pity. But immediately she launched forth again.

"But now you have asked me, I will never tell him! Be ruined—no—do something more dastardly to save yourself. If I sinned, my judgment went beforehand—that I should sin for a man like you."

Swiftly upon those last words Mrs Transome passed out of the room. The softly-padded door

closed behind her making no noise, and Jermyn found himself alone.

For a brief space he stood still. Human beings in moments of passionate reproach and denunciation, especially when their anger is on their own account, are never so wholly in the right that the person who has to wince cannot possibly protest against some unreasonableness or unfairness in their outburst. And if Jermyn had been capable of feeling that he had thoroughly merited this infliction, he would not have uttered the words that drew it down on him. Men do not become penitent and learn to abhor themselves by having their backs cut open with the lash; rather, they learn to abhor the lash. What Jermyn felt about Mrs Transome when she disappeared was, that she was a furious woman—who would not do what he wanted her to do. And he was supported as to his justifiableness by the inward repetition of what he had already said to her: it was right that Harold should know the truth. He did not take into account (how should he?) the exasperation and loathing excited by his daring to urge the plea of right. A man who had stolen the pyx, and got frightened when justice was at his heels, might feel the sort of penitence which would induce him to run back in the dark

and lay the pyx where the sexton might find it; but if in doing so he whispered to the Blessed Virgin that he was moved by considering the sacredness of all property, and the peculiar sacredness of the pyx, it is not to be believed that she would like him the better for it. Indeed, one often seems to see why the saints should prefer candles to words, especially from penitents whose skin is in danger. Some salt of generosity would have made Jermyn conscious that he had lost the citizenship which authorised him to plead the right; still more, that his self-vindication to Mrs Transome would be like the exhibition of a brand-mark, and only show that he was shame-proof. There is heroism even in the circles of hell for fellow-sinners who cling to each other in the fiery whirlwind and never recriminate. But these things, which are easy to discern when they are painted for us on the large canvass of poetic story, become confused and obscure even for well-read gentlemen when their affection for themselves is alarmed by pressing details of actual experience. If their comparison of instances is active at such times, it is chiefly in showing them that their own case has subtle distinctions from all other cases, which should free them from unmitigated condemnation.

And it was in this way with Matthew Jermyn. So many things were more distinctly visible to him, and touched him more acutely, than the effect of his acts or words on Mrs Transome's feelings! In fact—he asked, with a touch of something that makes us all akin—was it not preposterous, this excess of feeling on points which he himself did not find powerfully moving? She had treated him most unreasonably. It would have been right for her to do what he had—not asked, but only hinted at in a mild and interrogatory manner. But the clearest and most unpleasant result of the interview was, that this right thing which he desired so much would certainly not be done for him by Mrs Transome.

As he was moving his arm from the chair-back, and turning to take his hat, there was a boisterous noise in the entrance-hall; the door of the small drawing-room, which had closed without latching, was pushed open, and old Mr Transome appeared with a face of feeble delight, playing horse to little Harry, who roared and flogged behind him, while Moro yapped in a puppy voice at their heels. But when Mr Transome saw Jermyn in the room he stood still in the doorway, as if he did not know whether entrance were permissible. The majority

of his thoughts were but ravelled threads of the past. The attorney came forward to shake hands with due politeness, but the old man said, with a bewildered look, and in a hesitating way,

"Mr Jermyn?—why—why—where is Mrs Transome?"

Jermyn smiled his way out past the unexpected group; and little Harry, thinking he had an eligible opportunity, turned round to give a parting stroke on the stranger's coat-tails.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Whichever way my days decline,
I felt and feel, though left alone,
His being working in mine own,
The footsteps of his life in mine.

Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near, in woe and weal;
O, loved the most when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher!

TENNYSON: *In Memoriam.*

AFTER that morning on which Esther found herself reddened and confused by the sense of having made a distant allusion to Felix Holt, she felt it impossible that she should even, as she had sometimes intended, speak of him explicitly to Harold, in order to discuss the probabilities as to the issue of his trial. She was certain she could not do it without betraying emotion, and there were very complex reasons in Esther's mind why she could not bear that Harold should detect her sensibility on this subject. It was not only all the fibres of maidenly pride and reserve, of a bashfulness un-

definably peculiar towards this man, who, while much older than herself, and bearing the stamp of an experience quite hidden from her imagination, was taking strongly the aspect of a lover—it was not only this exquisite kind of shame which was at work within her: there was another sort of susceptibility in Esther, which her present circumstances tended to encourage, though she had come to regard it as not at all lofty, but rather as something which condemned her to littleness in comparison with a mind she had learned to venerate. She knew quite well that, to Harold Transome, Felix Holt was one of the common people who could come into question in no other than a public light. She had a native capability for discerning that the sense of ranks and degrees has its repulsions corresponding to the repulsions dependent on difference of race and colour; and she remembered her own impressions too well not to foresee that it would come on Harold Transome as a shock, if he suspected there had been any love-passages between her and this young man, who to him was of course no more than any other intelligent member of the working class. "To him," said Esther to herself, with a reaction of her newer, better pride, "who has not had the sort of intercourse in which Felix Holt's cultured nature

would have asserted its superiority." And in her fluctuations on this matter, she found herself mentally protesting that, whatever Harold might think, there was a light in which he was vulgar compared with Felix. Felix had ideas and motives which she did not believe that Harold could understand. More than all, there was this test: she herself had no sense of inferiority and just subjection when she was with Harold Transome; there were even points in him for which she felt a touch, not of angry, but of playful scorn; whereas with Felix she had always a sense of dependence and possible illumination. In those large, grave, candid grey eyes of his, love seemed something that belonged to the high enthusiasm of life, such as might now be for ever shut out from her.

All the same, her vanity winced at the idea that Harold should discern what, from his point of view, would seem like a degradation of her taste and refinement. She could not help being gratified by all the manifestations from those around her that she was thought thoroughly fitted for a high position—could not help enjoying, with more or less keenness, a rehearsal of that demeanour amongst luxuries and dignities which had often been a part of her day-dreams, and the rehearsal included the reception of

more and more emphatic attentions from Harold, and of an effusiveness in his manners, which, in proportion as it would have been offensive if it had appeared earlier, became flattering as the effect of a growing acquaintance and daily contact. It comes in so many forms in this life of ours—the knowledge that there is something sweetest and noblest of which we despair, and the sense of something present that solicits us with an immediate and easy indulgence. And there is a pernicious falsity in the pretence that a woman's love lies above the range of such temptations.

Day after day Esther had an arm offered her, had very beaming looks upon her, had opportunities for a great deal of light, airy talk, in which she knew herself to be charming, and had the attractive interest of noticing Harold's practical cleverness—the masculine ease with which he governed everybody and administered everything about him, without the least harshness, and with a facile good-nature which yet was not weak. In the background, too, there was the ever-present consideration, that if Harold Transome wished to marry her, and she accepted him, the problem of her lot would be more easily solved than in any other way. It was difficult by any theory of Providence, or consideration of results,

to see a course which she could call duty: if something would come and urge itself strongly as pleasure, and save her from the effort to find a clue of principle amid the labyrinthine confusions of right and possession, the promise could not but seem alluring. And yet, this life at Transome Court was *not* the life of her day-dreams: there was dulness already in its ease, and in the absence of high demand; and there was the vague consciousness that the love of this not unfascinating man who hovered about her gave an air of moral mediocrity to all her prospects. She would not have been able perhaps to define this impression; but somehow or other by this elevation of fortune it seemed that the higher ambition which had begun to spring in her was for ever nullified. All life seemed cheapened; as it might seem to a young student who, having believed that to gain a certain degree he must write a thesis in which he would bring his powers to bear with memorable effect, suddenly ascertained that no thesis was expected, but the sum (in English money) of twenty-seven pounds ten shillings and sixpence.

After all, she was a woman, and could not make her own lot. As she had once said to Felix, "A woman must choose meaner things, because only meaner things are offered to her." Her lot is made

for her by the love she accepts. And Esther began to think that her lot was being made for her by the love that was surrounding her with the influence of a garden on a summer morning.

Harold, on his side, was conscious that the interest of his wooing was not standing still. He was beginning to think it a conquest, in which it would be disappointing to fail, even if this fair nymph had no claim to the estate. He would have liked—and yet he would not have liked—that just a slight shadow of doubt as to his success should be removed. There was something about Esther that he did not altogether understand. She was clearly a woman that could be governed; she was too charming for him to fear that she would ever be obstinate or interfering. Yet there was a lightning that shot out of her now and then, which seemed the sign of a dangerous judgment; as if she inwardly saw something more admirable than Harold Transome. Now, to be perfectly charming, a woman should not see this.

One fine February day, when already the golden and purple crocuses were out on the terrace—one of those flattering days which sometimes precede the north-east winds of March, and make believe that the coming spring will be enjoyable—a very striking

group, of whom Esther and Harold made a part, came out at mid-day to walk upon the gravel at Transome Court. They did not, as usual, go towards the pleasure-grounds on the eastern side, because Mr Lingon, who was one of them, was going home, and his road lay through the stone gateway into the park.

Uncle Lingon, who disliked painful confidences, and preferred knowing "no mischief of anybody," had not objected to being let into the important secret about Esther, and was sure at once that the whole affair, instead of being a misfortune, was a piece of excellent luck. For himself, he did not profess to be a judge of women, but she seemed to have all the "points," and to carry herself as well as Arabella did, which was saying a good deal. Honest Jack Lingon's first impressions quickly became traditions, which no subsequent evidence could disturb. He was fond of his sister, and seemed never to be conscious of any change for the worse in her since their early time. He considered that man a beast who said anything unpleasant about the persons to whom he was attached. It was not that he winked; his wide-open eyes saw nothing but what his easy disposition inclined him to see. Harold was a good fellow; a clever chap; and

Esther's peculiar fitness for him, under all the circumstances, was extraordinary: it reminded him of something in the classics, though he couldn't think exactly what—in fact, a memory was a nasty uneasy thing. Esther was always glad when the old Rector came. With an odd contrariety to her former niceties she liked his rough attire and careless frank speech; they were something not point device that seemed to connect the life of Transome Court with that rougher, commoner world where her home had been.

She and Harold were walking a little in advance of the rest of the party, who were retarded by various causes. Old Mr Transome, wrapped in a cloth cloak trimmed with sable, and with a soft warm cap also trimmed with fur on his head, had a shuffling uncertain walk. Little Harry was dragging a toy-vehicle, on the seat of which he had insisted on tying Moro, with a piece of scarlet drapery round him, making him look like a barbaric prince in a chariot. Moro, having little imagination, objected to this, and barked with feeble snappishness as the tyrannous lad ran forward, then whirled the chariot round, and ran back to "Gappa," then came to a dead stop, which overset the chariot, that he might watch Uncle Lingon's water-spaniel run for the

hurled stick and bring it in his mouth. Nimrod kept close to his old master's legs, glancing with much indifference at this youthful ardour about sticks—he had "gone through all that;" and Dominic walked by, looking on blandly, and taking care both of young and old. Mrs Transome was not there.

Looking back and seeing that they were a good deal in advance of the rest, Esther and Harold paused.

"What do you think about thinning the trees over there?" said Harold, pointing with his stick. "I have a bit of a notion that if they were divided into clumps so as to show the oaks beyond, it would be a great improvement. It would give an idea of extent that is lost now. And there might be some very pretty clumps got out of those mixed trees. What do you think?"

"I should think it would be an improvement. One likes a 'beyond' everywhere. But I never heard you express yourself so dubiously," said Esther, looking at him rather archly: "you generally see things so clearly, and are so convinced, that I shall begin to feel quite tottering if I find you in uncertainty. Pray don't begin to be doubtful; it is so infectious."

"You think me a great deal too sure—too confident?" said Harold.

"Not at all. It is an immense advantage to know your own will, when you always mean to have it."

"But suppose I couldn't get it, in spite of meaning?" said Harold, with a beaming inquiry in his eyes.

"O then," said Esther, turning her head aside, carelessly, as if she were considering the distant birch-stems, "you would bear it quite easily, as you did your not getting into Parliament. You would know you could get it another time—or get something else as good."

"The fact is," said Harold, moving on a little, as if he did not want to be quite overtaken by the others, "you consider me a fat, fatuous, self-satisfied fellow."

"O there are degrees," said Esther, with a silvery laugh; "you have just as much of those qualities as is becoming. There are different styles. You are perfect in your own."

"But you prefer another style, I suspect. A more submissive, tearful, devout worshipper, who would offer his incense with more trembling."

"You are quite mistaken," said Esther, still

lightly. "I find I am very wayward. When anything is offered to me, it seems that I prize it less, and don't want to have it."

Here was a very baulking answer, but in spite of it Harold could not help believing that Esther was very far from objecting to the sort of incense he had been offering just then.

"I have often read that that is in human nature," she went on, "yet it takes me by surprise in myself. I suppose," she added, smiling, "I didn't think of myself as human nature."

"I don't confess to the same waywardness," said Harold. "I am very fond of things that I can get. And I never longed much for anything out of my reach. Whatever I feel sure of getting I like all the better. I think half those priggish maxims about human nature in the lump are no more to be relied on than universal remedies. There are different sorts of human nature. Some are given to discontent and longing, others to securing and enjoying. And let me tell you, the discontented longing style is unpleasant to live with."

Harold nodded with a meaning smile at Esther.

"O, I assure you I have abjured all admiration for it," she said, smiling up at him in return.

She was remembering the schooling Felix had

given her about her Byronic heroes, and was inwardly adding a third sort of human nature to those varieties which Harold had mentioned. He naturally supposed that he might take the abjuration to be entirely in his own favour. And his face did look very pleasant; she could not help liking him, although he was certainly too particular about sauces, gravies, and wines, and had a way of virtually measuring the value of everything by the contribution it made to his own pleasure. His very good-nature was unsympathetic: it never came from any thorough understanding or deep respect for what was in the mind of the person he obliged or indulged; it was like his kindness to his mother —an arrangement of his for the happiness of others, which, if they were sensible, ought to succeed. And an inevitable comparison which haunted her, showed her the same quality in his political views: the utmost enjoyment of his own advantages was the solvent that blended pride in his family and position, with the adhesion to changes that were to obliterate tradition and melt down enchased gold heirlooms into plating for the egg-spoons of "the people." It is terrible—the keen bright eye of a woman when it has once been turned with admiration on what is severely true; but then, the severely

true rarely comes within its range of vision. Esther had had an unusual illumination; Harold did not know how, but he discerned enough of the effect to make him more cautious than he had ever been in his life before. That caution would have prevented him just then from following up the question as to the style of person Esther would think pleasant to live with, even if Uncle Lingon had not joined them, as he did, to talk about soughing tiles; saying presently that he should turn across the grass and get on to the Home Farm, to have a look at the improvements that Harold was making with such racing speed.

"But you know, lad," said the Rector, as they paused at the expected parting, "you can't do everything in a hurry. The wheat must have time to grow, even when you've reformed all us old Tories off the face of the ground. Dash it! now the election's over: I'm an old Tory again. You see, Harold, a Radical won't do for the county. At another election, you must be on the look-out for a borough where they want a bit of blood. I should have liked you uncommonly to stand for the county; and a Radical of good family squares well enough with a new-fashioned Tory like young Debarry; but you see, these riots — it's been a

nasty business. I shall have my hair combed at the sessions for a year to come. But, heyday! What dame is this, with a small boy?—not one of my parishioners?"

Harold and Esther turned, and saw an elderly woman advancing with a tiny red-haired boy, scantily attired as to his jacket, which merged into a small sparrow-tail a little higher than his waist, but muffled as to his throat with a blue woollen comforter. Esther recognised the pair too well, and felt very uncomfortable. We are so pitiably in subjection to all sorts of vanity—even the very vanities we are practically renouncing! And in spite of the almost solemn memories connected with Mrs Holt, Esther's first shudder was raised by the idea of what things this woman would say, and by the mortification of having Felix in any way represented by his mother.

As Mrs Holt advanced into closer observation, it became more evident that she was attired with a view not to charm the eye, but rather to afflict it with all that expression of woe which belongs to very rusty bombazine and the limpest state of false hair. Still, she was not a woman to lose the sense of her own value, or become abject in her manners under any circumstances of depression; and she

had a peculiar sense on the present occasion that she was justly relying on the force of her own character and judgment, in independence of anything that Mr Lyon or the masterful Felix would have said, if she had thought them worthy to know of her undertaking. She curtsied once, as if to the entire group, now including even the dogs, who showed various degrees of curiosity, especially as to what kind of game the smaller animal Job might prove to be after due investigation; and then she proceeded at once towards Esther, who, in spite of her annoyance, took her arm from Harold's, said, "How do you do, Mrs Holt?" very kindly, and stooped to pat little Job.

"Yes—you know him, Miss Lyon," said Mrs Holt, in that tone which implies that the conversation is intended for the edification of the company generally; "you know the orphin child, as Felix brought home for me that am his mother to take care of. And it's what I've done—nobody more so—though it's trouble is my reward."

Esther had raised herself again, to stand in helpless endurance of whatever might be coming. But by this time young Harry, struck even more than the dogs by the appearance of Job Tudge, had come round dragging his chariot, and placed himself close

to the pale child, whom he exceeded in height and breadth, as well as in depth of colouring. He looked into Job's eyes, peeped round at the tail of his jacket and pulled it a little, and then, taking off the tiny cloth-cap, observed with much interest the tight red curls which had been hidden underneath it. Job looked at his inspector with the round blue eyes of astonishment, until Harry, purely by way of experiment, took a bon-bon from a fantastic wallet which hung over his shoulder, and applied the test to Job's lips. The result was satisfactory to both. Every one had been watching this small comedy, and when Job crunched the bon-bon while Harry looked down at him inquiringly and patted his back, there was general laughter except on the part of Mrs Holt, who was shaking her head slowly, and slapping the back of her left hand with the painful patience of a tragedian whose part is in abeyance to an ill-timed introduction of the humorous.

"I hope Job's cough has been better lately," said Esther, in mere uncertainty as to what it would be desirable to say or do.

"I daresay you hope so, Miss Lyon," said Mrs Holt, looking at the distant landscape. "I've no reason to disbelieve but what you wish well to the child, and to Felix, and to me. I'm sure nobody

has any occasion to wish me otherways. My character will bear inquiry, and what you, as are young, don't know, others can tell you. That was what I said to myself when I made up my mind to come here and see you, and ask you to get me the freedom to speak to Mr Transome. I said, whatever Miss Lyon may be now, in the way of being lifted up among great people, she's our minister's daughter, and was not above coming to my house and walking with my son Felix—though I'll not deny he made that figure on the Lord's Day, that'll perhaps go against him with the judge, if anybody thinks well to tell him."

Here Mrs Holt paused a moment, as with a mind arrested by the painful image it had called up.

Esther's face was glowing, when Harold glanced at her; and seeing this, he was considerate enough to address Mrs Holt instead of her.

"You are then the mother of the unfortunate young man who is in prison?"

"Indeed, I am, sir," said Mrs Holt, feeling that she was now in deep water. "It's not likely I should claim him if he wasn't my own; though it's not by my will, nor my advice, sir, that he ever walked; for I gave him none but good. But if everybody's son was guided by their mothers, the

world 'ud be different; my son is not worse than many another woman's son, and that in Treby, whatever they may say as haven't got their sons in prison. And as to his giving up the doctoring, and then stopping his father's medicines, I know it's bad—that I know—but it's me has had to suffer, and it's me a king and Parliament 'ud consider, if they meant to do the right thing, and had anybody to make it known to 'em. And as for the rioting and killing the constable—my son said most plain to me he never meant it, and there was his bit of potato-pie for his dinner getting dry by the fire, the whole blessed time as I sat and never knew what was coming on me. And it's my opinion as if great people make elections to get themselves into Parliament, and there's riot and murder to do it, they ought to see as the widow and the widow's son doesn't suffer for it. I well know my duty: and I read my Bible; and I know in Jude where it's been stained with the dried tulip-leaves this many a year, as you're told not to rail at your betters if they was the devil himself; nor will I; but this I do say, if it's three Mr Transomes instead of one as is listening to me, as there's them ought to go to the king and get him to let off my son Felix."

This speech, in its chief points, had been deliberately prepared. Mrs Holt had set her face like a flint, to make the gentry know their duty as she knew hers: her defiant, defensive tone was due to the consciousness, not only that she was braving a powerful audience, but that she was daring to stand on the strong basis of her own judgment in opposition to her son's. Her proposals had been waived off by Mr Lyon and Felix; but she had long had the feminine conviction that if she could "get to speak" in the right quarter, things might be different. The daring bit of impromptu about the three Mr Transomes was immediately suggested by a movement of old Mr Transome to the foreground in a line with Mr Lingon and Harold; his furred and unusual costume appearing to indicate a mysterious dignity which she must hasten to include in her appeal.

And there were reasons that none could have foreseen, which made Mrs Holt's remonstrance immediately effective. While old Mr Transome stared, very much like a waxen image in which the expression is a failure, and the Rector, accustomed to female parishioners and complainants, looked on with a smile in his eyes, Harold said at once, with cordial kindness—

"I think you are quite right, Mrs Holt. And for my part, I am determined to do my best for your son, both in the witness-box and elsewhere. Take comfort; if it is necessary, the king shall be appealed to. And rely upon it, I shall bear you in mind, as Felix Holt's mother."

Rapid thoughts had convinced Harold that in this way he was best commending himself to Esther.

"Well, sir," said Mrs Holt, who was not going to pour forth disproportionate thanks, "I'm glad to hear you speak so becoming; and if you had been the king himself, I should have made free to tell you my opinion. For the Bible says, the king's favour is towards a wise servant; and it's reasonable to think he'd make all the more account of them as have never been in service, or took wage, which I never did, and never thought of my son doing; and his father left money, meaning otherways, so as he might have been a doctor on horseback at this very minute, instead of being in prison."

"What! was he regularly apprenticed to a doctor?" said Mr Lingon, who had not understood this before.

"Sir, he was, and most clever, like his father

before him, only he turned contrairy. But as for harming anybody, Felix never meant to harm anybody but himself and his mother, which he certainly did in respect of his clothes, and taking to be a low working man, and stopping my living respectable, more particular by the pills, which had a sale, as you may be sure they suited people's insides. And what folks can never have boxes enough of to swallow, I should think you have a right to sell. And there's many and many a text for it, as I've opened on without ever thinking; for if it's true, 'Ask, and you shall have,' I should think it's truer when you're willing to pay for what you have."

This was a little too much for Mr Lingon's gravity; he exploded, and Harold could not help following him. Mrs Holt fixed her eyes on the distance, and slapped the back of her left hand again: it might be that this kind of mirth was the peculiar effect produced by forcible truth on high and worldly people who were neither in the Independent nor the General Baptist connection.

"I'm sure you must be tired with your long walk, and little Job too," said Esther, by way of breaking this awkward scene. "Arn't you, Job?" she added, stooping to caress the child, who was timidly shrinking from Harry's invitation to him to pull the little

chariot—Harry's view being that Job would make a good horse for him to beat, and would run faster than Gappa.

"It's well you can feel for the orphin child, Miss Lyon," said Mrs Holt, choosing an indirect answer rather than to humble herself by confessing fatigue before gentlemen who seemed to be taking her too lightly. "I didn't believe but what you'd behave pretty, as you always did to me, though everybody used to say you held yourself high. But I'm sure you never did to Felix, for you let him sit by you at the Free School before all the town, and him with never a bit of stock round his neck. And it shows you saw *that* in him worth taking notice of;—and it is but right, if you know my words are true, as you should speak for him to the gentlemen."

"I assure you, Mrs Holt," said Harold, coming to the rescue—"I assure you that enough has been said to make me use my best efforts for your son. And now, pray, go on to the house with the little boy and take some rest. Dominic, show Mrs Holt the way, and ask Mrs Hickes to make her comfortable, and see that somebody takes her back to Treby in the buggy."

"I will go back with Mrs Holt," said Esther, making an effort against herself.

"No, pray," said Harold, with that kind of entreaty which is really a decision. "Let Mrs Holt have time to rest. We shall have returned, and you can see her before she goes. We will say goodbye for the present, Mrs Holt."

The poor woman was not sorry to have the prospect of rest and food, especially for "the orphin child," of whom she was tenderly careful. Like many women who appear to others to have a masculine decisiveness of tone, and to themselves to have a masculine force of mind, and who come into severe collision with sons arrived at the masterful stage, she had the maternal cord vibrating strongly within her towards all tiny children. And when she saw Dominic pick up Job and hoist him on his arm for a little while, by way of making acquaintance, she regarded him with an approval which she had not thought it possible to extend to a foreigner. Since Dominic was going, Harry and old Mr Transome chose to follow. Uncle Lingon shook hands and turned off across the grass, and thus Esther was left alone with Harold.

But there was a new consciousness between them. Harold's quick perception was least likely to be slow in seizing indications of anything that might affect his position with regard to Esther. Some

time before, his jealousy had been awakened to the possibility that before she had known him she had been deeply interested in some one else. Jealousy of all sorts—whether for our fortune or our love—is ready at combinations, and likely even to outstrip the fact. And Esther's renewed confusion, united with her silence about Felix, which now first seemed noteworthy, and with Mrs Holt's graphic details as to her walking with him and letting him sit by her before all the town, were grounds not merely for a suspicion, but for a conclusion in Harold's mind. The effect of this, which he at once regarded as a discovery, was rather different from what Esther had anticipated. It seemed to him that Felix was the least formidable person that he could have found out as an object of interest antecedent to himself. A young workman who had got himself thrown into prison, whatever recommendations he might have had for a girl at a romantic age in the dreariness of Dissenting society at Treby, could hardly be considered by Harold in the light of a rival. Esther was too clever and tasteful a woman to make a ballad heroine of herself, by bestowing her beauty and her lands on this lowly lover. Besides, Harold cherished the belief that, at the present time, Esther was more wisely disposed to bestow these things on

another lover in every way eligible. But in two directions this discovery had a determining effect on him; his curiosity was stirred to know exactly what the relation with Felix had been, and he was solicitous that his behaviour with regard to this young man should be such as to enhance his own merit in Esther's eyes. At the same time he was not inclined to any euphemisms that would seem by any possibility to bring Felix into the lists with himself.

Naturally, when they were left alone, it was Harold who spoke first. "I should think there's a good deal of worth in this young fellow—this Holt, notwithstanding the mistakes he has made. A little queer and conceited, perhaps; but that is usually the case with men of his class when they are at all superior to their fellows."

"Felix Holt is a highly cultivated man; he is not at all conceited," said Esther. The different kinds of pride within her were coalescing now. She was aware that there had been a betrayal.

"Ah?" said Harold, not quite liking the tone of this answer. "This eccentricity is a sort of fanaticism, then?—this giving up being a doctor on horseback, as the old woman calls it, and taking to—let me see—watchmaking, isn't it?"

"If it is eccentricity to be very much better than other men, he is certainly eccentric; and fanatical too, if it is fanatical to renounce all small selfish motives for the sake of a great and unselfish one. I never knew what nobleness of character really was before I knew Felix Holt."

It seemed to Esther as if, in the excitement of this moment, her own words were bringing her a clearer revelation.

"God bless me!" said Harold, in a tone of surprised yet thorough belief, and looking in Esther's face. "I wish you had talked to me about this before."

Esther at that moment looked perfectly beautiful, with an expression which Harold had never hitherto seen. All the confusion which had depended on personal feeling had given way before the sense that she had to speak the truth about the man whom she felt to be admirable.

"I think I didn't see the meaning of anything fine—I didn't even see the value of my father's character, until I had been taught a little by hearing what Felix Holt said, and seeing that his life was like his words."

Harold looked and listened, and felt his slight jealousy allayed rather than heightened. "This is not

like love," he said to himself, with some satisfaction. With all due regard to Harold Transome, he was one of those men who are liable to make the greater mistakes about a particular woman's feelings, because they pique themselves on a power of interpretation derived from much experience. Experience is enlightening, but with a difference. Experiments on live animals may go on for a long period, and yet the fauna on which they are made may be limited. There may be a passion in the mind of a woman which precipitates her, not along the path of easy beguilement, but into a great leap away from it. Harold's experience had not taught him this; and Esther's enthusiasm about Felix Holt did not seem to him to be dangerous.

"He's quite an apostolic sort of fellow, then," was the self-quieting answer he gave to her last words. "He didn't look like that; but I had only a short interview with him, and I was given to understand that he refused to see me in prison. I believe he's not very well inclined towards me. But you saw a great deal of him, I suppose; and your testimony to any one is enough for me," said Harold, lowering his voice rather tenderly. "Now I know what your opinion is, I shall spare no effort on behalf of such a young man. In fact, I had come to

the same resolution before, but your wish would make difficult things easy."

After that energetic speech of Esther's, as often happens, the tears had just suffused her eyes. It was nothing more than might have been expected in a tender-hearted woman, considering Felix Holt's circumstances, and the tears only made more lovely the look with which she met Harold's when he spoke so kindly. She felt pleased with him; she was open to the fallacious delight of being assured that she had power over him to make him do what she liked, and quite forgot the many impressions which had convinced her that Harold had a padded yoke ready for the neck of every man, woman, and child that depended on him.

After a short silence, they were getting near the stone gateway, and Harold said, with an air of intimate consultation—

"What could we do for this young man, supposing he were let off? I shall send a letter with fifty pounds to the old woman to-morrow. I ought to have done it before, but it really slipped my memory, amongst the many things that have occupied me lately. But this young man—what do you think would be the best thing we could do for him, if he gets at large again? He should be put

in a position where his qualities could be more telling."

Esther was recovering her liveliness a little, and was disposed to encourage it for the sake of veiling other feelings, about which she felt renewed reticence, now that the overpowering influence of her enthusiasm was past. She was rather wickedly amused and scornful at Harold's misconceptions and ill-placed intentions of patronage.

"You are hopelessly in the dark," she said, with a light laugh and toss of her head. "What would you offer Felix Holt? a place in the Excise? You might as well think of offering it to John the Baptist. Felix has chosen his lot. He means always to be a poor man."

"Means? Yes," said Harold, slightly piqued, "but what a man means usually depends on what happens. I mean to be a commoner; but a peerage might present itself under acceptable circumstances."

"O there is no sum in proportion to be done there," said Esther, again gaily. "As you are to a peerage, so is *not* Felix Holt to any offer of advantage that you could imagine for him."

"You must think him fit for any position—the first in the county."

"No, I don't," said Esther, shaking her head mischievously. "I think him too high for it."

"I see you can be ardent in your admiration."

"Yes, it is my champagne; you know I don't like the other kind."

"That would be satisfactory if one were sure of getting your admiration," said Harold, leading her up to the terrace, and amongst the crocuses, from whence they had a fine view of the park and river. They stood still near the east parapet, and saw the dash of light on the water, and the pencilled shadows of the trees on the grassy lawn.

"Would it do as well to admire you, instead of being worthy to be admired?" said Harold, turning his eyes from that landscape to Esther's face.

"It would be a thing to be put up with," said Esther, smiling at him rather roguishly. "But you are not in that state of self-despair."

"Well, I am conscious of not having those severe virtues that you have been praising."

"That is true. You are quite in another *genre*."

"A woman would not find me a tragic hero."

"O, no! She must dress for genteel comedy—such as your mother once described to me—where the most thrilling event is the drawing of a handsome cheque."

"You are a naughty fairy," said Harold, daring to press Esther's hand a little more closely to him, and drawing her down the eastern steps into the pleasure-ground, as if he were unwilling to give up the conversation. "Confess that you are disgusted with my want of romance."

"I shall not confess to being disgusted. I shall ask you to confess that you are not a romantic figure."

"I am a little too stout."

"For romance—yes. At least you must find security for not getting stouter."

"And I don't look languishing enough?"

"O yes—rather too much so—at a fine cigar."

"And I am not in danger of committing suicide?"

"No; you are a widower."

Harold did not reply immediately to this last thrust of Esther's. She had uttered it with innocent thoughtlessness from the playful suggestions of the moment; but it was a fact that Harold's previous married life had entered strongly into her impressions about him. The presence of Harry made it inevitable. Harold took this allusion of Esther's as an indication that his quality of widower was a point that made against him; and after a brief silence he said, in an altered, more serious tone—

"You don't suppose, I hope, that any other woman has ever held the place that you could hold in my life?"

Esther began to tremble a little, as she always did when the love-talk between them seemed getting serious. She only gave the rather stumbling answer, "How so?"

"Harry's mother had been a slave—was bought, in fact."

It was impossible for Harold to preconceive the effect this had on Esther. His natural disqualification for judging of a girl's feelings was heightened by the blinding effect of an exclusive object—which was to assure her that her own place was peculiar and supreme. Hitherto Esther's acquaintance with Oriental love was derived chiefly from Byronic poems, and this had not sufficed to adjust her mind to a new story, where the Giaour concerned was giving her his arm. She was unable to speak; and Harold went on—

"Though I am close on thirty-five, I never met with a woman at all like you before. There are new eras in one's life that are equivalent to youth—are something better than youth. I was never an aspirant till I knew you."

Esther was still silent.

"Not that I dare to call myself that. I am not so confident a personage as you imagine. I am necessarily in a painful position for a man who has any feeling."

Here at last Harold had stirred the right fibre. Esther's generosity seized at once the whole meaning implied in that last sentence. She had a fine sensibility to the line at which flirtation must cease; and she was now pale, and shaken with feelings she had not yet defined for herself.

"Do not let us speak of difficult things any more now," she said, with gentle seriousness. "I am come into a new world of late, and have to learn life all over again. Let us go in. I must see poor Mrs Holt again, and my little friend Job."

She paused at the glass door that opened on the terrace, and entered there, while Harold went round to the stables.

When Esther had been up-stairs and descended again into the large entrance-hall, she found its stony spaciousness made lively by human figures extremely unlike the statues. Since Harry insisted on playing with Job again, Mrs Holt and her orphan, after dining, had just been brought to this delightful scene for a game at hide-and-seek, and for exhibiting the climbing powers of the two pet-squirrels.

Mrs Holt sat on a stool, in singular relief against the pedestal of the Apollo, while Dominic and Denner (otherwise Mrs Hickes) bore her company; Harry, in his bright red and purple, flitted about like a great tropic bird after the sparrow-tailed Job, who hid himself with much intelligence behind the scagliola pillars and the pedestals; while one of the squirrels perched itself on the head of the tallest statue, and the other was already peeping down from among the heavy stuccoed angels on the ceiling, near the summit of a pillar.

Mrs Holt held on her lap a basket filled with good things for Job, and seemed much soothed by pleasant company and excellent treatment. As Esther, descending softly and unobserved, leaned over the stone bannisters and looked at the scene for a minute or two, she saw that Mrs Holt's attention, having been directed to the squirrel which had scampered on to the head of the Silenus carrying the infant Bacchus, had been drawn downward to the tiny babe looked at with so much affection by the rather ugly and hairy gentleman, of whom she nevertheless spoke with reserve as of one who possibly belonged to the Transome family.

"It's most pretty to see its little limbs, and the gentleman holding it. I should think he was

amiable by his look; but it was odd he should have his likeness took without any clothes. Was he Transome by name?" (Mrs Holt suspected that there might be a mild madness in the family.)

Denner, peering and smiling quietly, was about to reply, when she was prevented by the appearance of old Mr Transome, who since his walk had been having "forty winks" on the sofa in the library, and now came out to look for Harry. He had doffed his furred cap and cloak, but in lying down to sleep he had thrown over his shoulders a soft Oriental scarf which Harold had given him, and this still hung over his scanty white hair and down to his knees, held fast by his wooden-looking arms and laxly clasped hands, which fell in front of him.

This singular appearance of an undoubted Transome fitted exactly into Mrs Holt's thought at the moment. It lay in the probabilities of things that gentry's intellects should be peculiar: since they had not to get their own living, the good Lord might have economised in their case that common sense which others were so much more in need of; and in the shuffling figure before her she saw a descendant of the gentleman who had chosen to be represented without his clothes—all the more eccentric where there were the means of buying the best. But

these oddities "said nothing" in great folks, who were powerful in high quarters all the same. And Mrs Holt rose and curtsied with a proud respect, precisely as she would have done if Mr Transome had looked as wise as Lord Burleigh.

"I hope I'm in no ways taking a liberty, sir," she began, while the old gentleman looked at her with bland feebleness; "I'm not that woman to sit anywhere out of my own home without inviting, and pressing too. But I was brought here to wait, because the little gentleman wanted to play with the orphin child."

"Very glad, my good woman—sit down—sit down," said Mr Transome, nodding and smiling between his clauses. "Nice little boy. Your grandchild?"

"Indeed, sir, no," said Mrs Holt, continuing to stand. Quite apart from any awe of Mr Transome—sitting down, she felt, would be a too great familiarity with her own pathetic importance on this extra and unlooked-for occasion. "It's not me has any grandchild, nor ever shall have, though most fit. But with my only son saying he'll never be married, and in prison besides, and some saying he'll be transported, you may see yourself—though a gentleman—as there isn't much chance of my having

grandchildren of my own. And this is old Master Tudge's grandchild, as my own Felix took to for pity because he was sickly and clemm'd, and I was noways against it, being of a tender heart. For I'm a widow myself, and my son Felix, though big, is fatherless, and I know my duty in consequence. And it's to be wished, sir, as others should know it as are more in power and live in great houses, and can ride in a carriage where they will. And if you're the gentleman as is the head of everything —and it's not to be thought you'd give up to your son as a poor widow's been forced to do—it behoves you to take the part of them as are deserving; for the Bible says, grey hairs should speak."

"Yes, yes—poor woman—what shall I say?" said old Mr Transome, feeling himself scolded, and as usual desirousof mollifying displeasure.

"Sir, I can tell you what to say fast enough; for it's what I should say myself if I could get to speak to the King. For I've asked them that know, and they say it's the truth both out of the Bible and in, as the King can pardon anything and anybody. And judging by his countenance on the new signs, and the talk there was a while ago about his being the people's friend, as the minister once said it from the very pulpit—if there's any meaning in words, he'll

do the right thing by me and my son, if he's asked proper."

"Yes—a very good man—he'll do anything right," said Mr Transome, whose own ideas about the King just then were somewhat misty, consisting chiefly in broken reminiscences of George the Third. "I'll ask him anything you like," he added, with a pressing desire to satisfy Mrs Holt, who alarmed him slightly

"Then, sir, if you'll go in your carriage and say, This young man, Felix Holt by name, as his father was known the country round, and his mother most respectable—he never meant harm to anybody, and so far from bloody murder and fighting, would part with his victual to them that needed it more—and if you'd get other gentlemen to say the same, and if they're not satisfied to inquire—I'll not believe but what the King 'ud let my son out of prison. Or if it's true he must stand his trial, the King 'ud take care no mischief happened to him. I've got my senses, and I'll never believe as in a country where there's a God above and a king below, the right thing can't be done if great people was willing to do it."

Mrs Holt, like all orators, had waxed louder and more energetic, ceasing to propel her arguments,

and being propelled by them. Poor old Mr Transome, getting more and more frightened at this severe-spoken woman, who had the horrible possibility to his mind of being a novelty that was to become permanent, seemed to be fascinated by fear, and stood helplessly forgetful that if he liked he might turn round and walk away.

Little Harry, alive to anything that had relation to "Gappa," had paused in his game, and, discerning what he thought a hostile aspect in this naughty black old woman, rushed towards her and proceeded first to beat her with his mimic jockey's whip, and then, suspecting that her bombazine was not sensitive, to set his teeth in her arm. While Dominic rebuked him and pulled him off, Nimrod began to bark anxiously, and the scene was become alarming even to the squirrels, which scrambled as far off as possible.

Esther, who had been waiting for an opportunity of intervention, now came up to Mrs Holt to speak some soothing words; and old Mr Transome, seeing a sufficient screen between himself and his formidable suppliant, at last gathered courage to turn round and shuffle away with unusual swiftness into the library.

"Dear Mrs Holt," said Esther, "do rest com-

forted. I assure you, you have done the utmost that can be done by your words. Your visit has not been thrown away. See how the children have enjoyed it! I saw little Job actually laughing. I think I never saw him do more than smile before." Then, turning round to Dominic, she said, "Will the buggy come round to this door?"

This hint was sufficient. Dominic went to see if the vehicle was ready, and Denner, remarking that Mrs Holt would like to mount it in the inner court, invited her to go back into the housekeeper's room. But there was a fresh resistance raised in Harry by the threatened departure of Job, who had seemed an invaluable addition to the menagerie of tamed creatures; and it was barely in time that Esther had the relief of seeing the entrance-hall cleared so as to prevent any further encounter of Mrs Holt with Harold, who was now coming up the flight of steps at the entrance.

CHAPTER XLIV.

I'm sick at heart. The eye of day,
The insistent summer noon, seems pitiless,
Shining in all the barren crevices
Of weary life, leaving no shade, no dark,
Where I may dream that hidden waters lie.

SHORTLY after Mrs Holt's striking presentation of herself at Transome Court, Esther went on a second visit to her father. The Loamford Assizes were approaching; it was expected that in about ten days Felix Holt's trial would come on, and some hints in her father's letters had given Esther the impression that he was taking a melancholy view of the result. Harold Transome had once or twice mentioned the subject with a facile hopefulness as to "the young fellow's coming off easily," which, in her anxious mind, was not a counterpoise to disquieting suggestions, and she had not chosen to introduce another conversation about Felix Holt, by questioning Harold concerning the probabilities he relied on. Since those moments on the terrace, Harold had daily be-

come more of the solicitous and indirectly beseeching lover; and Esther, from the very fact that she was weighed on by thoughts that were painfully bewildering to her—by thoughts which, in their newness to her young mind, seemed to shake her belief that life could be anything else than a compromise with things repugnant to the moral taste—had become more passive to his attentions at the very time that she had begun to feel more profoundly that in accepting Harold Transome she left the high mountain air, the passionate serenity of perfect love for ever behind her, and must adjust her wishes to a life of middling delights, overhung with the languorous haziness of motiveless ease, where poetry was only literature, and the fine ideas had to be taken down from the shelves of the library when her husband's back was turned. But it seemed as if all outward conditions concurred, along with her generous sympathy for the Transomes, and with those native tendencies against which she had once begun to struggle, to make this middling lot the best she could attain to. She was in this half-sad half-satisfied resignation to something like what is called worldly wisdom, when she went to see her father, and learn what she could from him about Felix.

The little minister was much depressed, unable

to resign himself to the dread which had begun to haunt him, that Felix might have to endure the odious penalty of transportation for the manslaughter, which was the offence that no evidence in his favour could disprove.

"I had been encouraged by the assurances of men instructed in this regard," said Mr Lyon, while Esther sat on the stool near him, and listened anxiously, "that though he were pronounced guilty in regard to this deed whereinto he hath calamitously fallen, yet that a judge mildly disposed, and with a due sense of that invisible activity of the soul whereby the deeds which are the same in the outward appearance and effect, yet differ as the knife-stroke of the surgeon, even though it kill, differs from the knife-stroke of a wanton mutilator, might use his discretion in tempering the punishment, so that it would not be very evil to bear. But now it is said that the judge who cometh is a severe man, and one nourishing a prejudice against the bolder spirits who stand not in the old paths."

"I am going to be present at the trial, father," said Esther, who was preparing the way to express a wish, which she was timid about even with her father. "I mentioned to Mrs Transome that I should like to do so, and she said that she used in old days

always to attend the assizes, and that she would take me. You will be there, father?"

"Assuredly I shall be there, having been summoned to bear witness to Felix's character, and to his having uttered remonstrances and warnings long beforehand whereby he proved himself an enemy to riot. In our ears, who know him, it sounds strangely that aught else should be credible; but he hath few to speak for him, though I trust that Mr Harold Transome's testimony will go far, if, as you say, he is disposed to set aside all minor regards, and not to speak the truth grudgingly and reluctantly. For the very truth hath a colour from the disposition of the utterer."

"He is kind; he is capable of being generous," said Esther.

"It is well. For I verily believe that evil-minded men have been at work against Felix. The *Duffield Watchman* hath written continually in allusion to him as one of those mischievous men who seek to elevate themselves through the dishonour of their party; and as one of those who go not heart and soul with the needs of the people, but seek only to get a hearing for themselves by raising their voices in crotchety discord. It is these things that cause me

heaviness of spirit: the dark secret of this young man's lot is a cross I carry daily."

"Father," said Esther, timidly, while the eyes of both were filling with tears, "I should like to see him again, before his trial. Might I? Will you ask him? Will you take me?"

The minister raised his suffused eyes to hers, and did not speak for a moment or two. A new thought had visited him. But his delicate tenderness shrank even from an inward inquiry that was too curious—that seemed like an effort to peep at sacred secrets.

"I see nought against it, my dear child, if you arrived early enough, and would take the elderly lady into your confidence, so that you might descend from the carriage at some suitable place—the house of the Independent minister, for example—where I could meet and accompany you. I would forewarn Felix, who would doubtless delight to see your face again; seeing that he may go away, and be, as it were, buried from you, even though it may be only in prison, and not——"

This was too much for Esther. She threw her arms round her father's neck and sobbed like a child. It was an unspeakable relief to her after all the pent-up stifling experience, all the inward

incommunicable debate of the last few weeks. The old man was deeply moved too, and held his arm close round the dear child, praying silently.

No word was spoken for some minutes, till Esther raised herself, dried her eyes, and with an action that seemed playful, though there was no smile on her face, pressed her handkerchief against her father's cheeks. Then, when she had put her hand in his, he said, solemnly,

"'Tis a great and mysterious gift, this clinging of the heart, my Esther, whereby it hath often seemed to me that even in the very moment of suffering our souls have the keenest foretaste of heaven. I speak not lightly, but as one who hath endured. And 'tis a strange truth that only in the agony of parting we look into the depths of love."

So the interview ended, without any question from Mr Lyon concerning what Esther contemplated as the ultimate arrangement between herself and the Transomes.

After this conversation, which showed him that what happened to Felix touched Esther more closely than he had supposed, the minister felt no impulse to raise the images of a future so unlike anything that

Felix would share. And Esther would have been unable to answer any such questions. The successive weeks, instead of bringing her nearer to clearness and decision, had only brought that state of disenchantment belonging to the actual presence of things which have long dwelt in the imagination with all the factitious charms of arbitrary arrangement. Her imaginary mansion had not been inhabited just as Transome Court was; her imaginary fortune had not been attended with circumstances which she was unable to sweep away. She herself, in her Utopia, had never been what she was now—a woman whose heart was divided and oppressed. The first spontaneous offering of her woman's devotion, the first great inspiration of her life, was a sort of vanished ecstasy which had left its wounds. It seemed to her a cruel misfortune of her young life that her best feeling, her most precious dependence, had been called forth just where the conditions were hardest, and that all the easy invitations of circumstance were towards something which that previous consecration of her longing had made a moral descent for her. It was characteristic of her that she scarcely at all entertained the alternative of such a compromise as would have given her the

larger portion of the fortune to which she had a legal claim, and yet have satisfied her sympathy by leaving the Transomes in possession of their old home. Her domestication with this family had brought them into the foreground of her imagination; the gradual wooing of Harold had acted on her with a constant immediate influence that predominated over all indefinite prospects; and a solitary elevation to wealth, which out of Utopia she had no notion how she should manage, looked as chill and dreary as the offer of dignities in an unknown country.

In the ages since Adam's marriage, it has been good for some men to be alone, and for some women also. But Esther was not one of these women: she was intensely of the feminine type, verging neither towards the saint nor the angel. She was "a fair divided excellence, whose fulness of perfection" must be in marriage. And, like all youthful creatures, she felt as if the present conditions of choice were final. It belonged to the freshness of her heart that, having had her emotions strongly stirred by real objects, she never speculated on possible relations yet to come. It seemed to her that she stood at the first and last parting of the ways. And, in one sense,

she was under no illusion. It is only in that freshness of our time that the choice is possible which gives unity to life, and makes the memory a temple where all relics and all votive offerings, all worship and all grateful joy, are an unbroken history sanctified by one religion.

CHAPTER XLV.

We may not make this world a paradise
By walking it together with clasped hands
And eyes that meeting feed a double strength.
We must be only joined by pains divine,
Of spirits blent in mutual memories.

It was a consequence of that interview with her father, that when Esther stepped early on a grey March morning into the carriage with Mrs Transome, to go to the Loamford Assizes, she was full of an expectation that held her lips in trembling silence, and gave her eyes that sightless beauty which tells that the vision is all within.

Mrs Transome did not disturb her with unnecessary speech. Of late, Esther's anxious observation had been drawn to a change in Mrs Transome, shown in many small ways which only women notice. It was not only that when they sat together the talk seemed more of an effort to her: that might have come from the gradual draining away of matter for discourse pertaining to most sorts

of companionship, in which repetition is not felt to be as desirable as novelty. But while Mrs Transome was dressed just as usual, took her seat as usual, trifled with her drugs and had her embroidery before her as usual, and still made her morning greetings with that finished easy politeness and consideration of tone which to rougher people seems like affection, Esther noticed a strange fitfulness in her movements. Sometimes the stitches of her embroidery went on with silent unbroken swiftness for a quarter of an hour as if she had to work out her deliverance from bondage by finishing a scroll-patterned border; then her hands dropt suddenly and her gaze fell blankly on the table before her, and she would sit in that way motionless as a seated statue, apparently unconscious of Esther's presence, till some thought darting within her seemed to have the effect of an external shock and rouse her with a start, when she looked round hastily like a person ashamed of having slept. Esther, touched with wondering pity at signs of unhappiness that were new in her experience, took the most delicate care to appear inobservant, and only tried to increase the gentle attention that might help to soothe or gratify this uneasy woman. But, one morning, Mrs Transome had said, breaking rather a long silence,

"My dear, I shall make this house dull for you. You sit with me like an embodied patience. I am unendurable; I am getting into a melancholy dotage. A fidgety old woman like me is as unpleasant to see as a rook with its wing broken. Don't mind me, my dear. Run away from me without ceremony. Every one else does, you see. I am part of the old furniture with new drapery."

"Dear Mrs Transome," said Esther, gliding to the low ottoman close by the basket of embroidery, "do you dislike my sitting with you?"

"Only for your own sake, my fairy," said Mrs Transome, smiling faintly, and putting her hand under Esther's chin. "Doesn't it make you shudder to look at me?"

"Why will you say such naughty things?" said Esther, affectionately. "If you had had a daughter, she would have desired to be with you most when you most wanted cheering. And surely every young woman has something of a daughter's feeling towards an older one who has been kind to her."

"I should like you to be really my daughter," said Mrs Transome, rousing herself to look a little brighter. "That is something still for an old woman to hope for."

Esther blushed: she had not foreseen this appli-

cation of words that came from pitying tenderness. To divert the train of thought as quickly as possible, she at once asked what she had previously had in her mind to ask. Before her blush had disappeared she said,

"O, you are so good; I shall ask you to indulge me very much. It is to let us set out very early to Loamford on Wednesday, and put me down at a particular house, that I may keep an engagement with my father. It is a private matter, that I wish no one to know about, if possible. And he will bring me back to you wherever you appoint."

In that way Esther won her end without needing to betray it; and as Harold was already away at Loamford, she was the more secure.

The Independent minister's house at which she was set down, and where she was received by her father, was in a quiet street not far from the jail. Esther had thrown a dark cloak over the handsomer coverings which Denner had assured her was absolutely required of ladies who sat anywhere near the judge at a great trial; and as the bonnet of that day did not throw the face into high relief, but rather into perspective, a veil drawn down gave her a sufficiently inconspicuous appearance.

"I have arranged all things, my dear," said Mr

Lyon, "and Felix expects us. We will lose no time."

They walked away at once, Esther not asking a question. She had no consciousness of the road along which they passed; she could never remember anything but a dim sense of entering within high walls and going along passages, till they were ushered into a larger space than she expected, and her father said,—

"It is here that we are permitted to see Felix, my Esther. He will presently appear."

Esther automatically took off her gloves and bonnet, as if she had entered the house after a walk. She had lost the complete consciousness of everything except that she was going to see Felix. She trembled. It seemed to her as if he too would look altered after her new life—as if even the past would change for her and be no longer a steadfast remembrance, but something she had been mistaken about, as she had been about the new life. Perhaps she was growing out of that childhood to which common things have rareness, and all objects look larger. Perhaps from henceforth the whole world was to be meaner for her. The dread concentrated in those moments seemed worse than anything she had known before. It was what the dread of a pilgrim

might be who has it whispered to him that the holy places are a delusion, or that he will see them with a soul unstirred and unbelieving. Every minute that passes may be charged with some such crisis in the little inner world of man or woman.

But soon the door opened slightly; some one looked in; then it opened wide, and Felix Holt entered.

"Miss Lyon—Esther!" and her hand was in his grasp.

He was just the same—no, something inexpressibly better, because of the distance and separation, and the half-weary novelties, which made him like the return of morning.

"Take no heed of me, children," said Mr Lyon. "I have some notes to make, and my time is precious. We may remain here only a quarter of an hour." And the old man sat down at a window with his back to them, writing with his head bent close to the paper.

"You are very pale; you look ill, compared with your old self," said Esther. She had taken her hand away, but they stood still near each other, she looking up at him.

"The fact is, I'm not fond of prison," said Felix, smiling; "but I suppose the best I can hope for is to have a good deal more of it."

"It is thought that in the worst case a pardon may be obtained," said Esther, avoiding Harold Transome's name.

"I don't rely on that," said Felix, shaking his head. "My wisest course is to make up my mind to the very ugliest penalty they can condemn me to. If I can face that, anything less will seem easy. But you know," he went on, smiling at her brightly, "I never went in for fine company and cushions. I can't be very heavily disappointed in that way."

"Do you see things just as you used to do?" said Esther, turning pale as she said it—"I mean—about poverty, and the people you will live among. Has all the misunderstanding and sadness left you just as obstinate?" She tried to smile, but could not succeed.

"What—about the sort of life I should lead if I were free again?" said Felix.

"Yes. I can't help being discouraged for you by all these things that have happened. See how you may fail!" Esther spoke timidly. She saw a peculiar smile, which she knew well, gathering in his eyes. "Ah, I daresay I am silly," she said, deprecatingly.

"No, you are dreadfully inspired," said Felix.

"When the wicked Tempter is tired of snarling that word failure in a man's cell, he sends a voice like a thrush to say it for him. See now what a messenger of darkness you are!" He smiled, and took her two hands between his, pressed together as children hold them up in prayer. Both of them felt too solemnly to be bashful. They looked straight into each other's eyes, as angels do when they tell some truth. And they stood in that way while he went on speaking.

"But I'm proof against that word failure. I've seen behind it. The only failure a man ought to fear is failure in cleaving to the purpose he sees to be best. As to just the amount of result he may see from his particular work—that's a tremendous uncertainty: the universe has not been arranged for the gratification of his feelings. As long as a man sees and believes in some great good, he'll prefer working towards that in the way he's best fit for, come what may. I put effects at their minimum, but I'd rather have the minimum of effect, if it's of the sort I care for, than the maximum of effect I don't care for—a lot of fine things that are not to my taste—and if they were, the conditions of holding them while the world is what it is, are such as would jar on me like grating metal."

"Yes," said Esther, in a low tone, "I think I understand that now, better than I used to do." The words of Felix at last seemed strangely to fit her own experience. But she said no more, though he seemed to wait for it a moment or two, looking at her. But then he went on—

"I don't mean to be illustrious, you know, and make a new era, else it would be kind of you to get a raven and teach it to croak 'failure' in my ears. Where great things can't happen, I care for very small things, such as will never be known beyond a few garrets and workshops. And then, as to one thing I believe in, I don't think I can altogether fail. If there's anything our people want convincing of, it is, that there's some dignity and happiness for a man other than changing his station. That's one of the beliefs I choose to consecrate my life to. If anybody could demonstrate to me that I was a flat for it, I shouldn't think it would follow that I must borrow money to set up genteelly and order new clothes. That's not a rigorous consequence to my understanding."

They smiled at each other, with the old sense of amusement they had so often had together.

"You are just the same," said Esther.

"And you?" said Felix. "My affairs have been

settled long ago. But yours—a great change has come in them—magic at work."

"Yes," said Esther, rather falteringly.

"Well," said Felix, looking at her gravely again, "it's a case of fitness that seems to give a chance sanction to that musty law. The first time I saw you, your birth was an immense puzzle to me. However, the appropriate conditions are come at last."

These words seemed cruel to Esther. But Felix could not know all the reasons for their seeming so. She could not speak; she was turning cold and feeling her heart beat painfully.

"All your tastes are gratified now," he went on innocently. "But you'll remember the old pedagogue and his lectures?"

One thought in the mind of Felix was, that Esther was sure to marry Harold Transome. Men readily believe these things of the women who love them. But he could not allude to the marriage more directly. He was afraid of this destiny for her, without having any very distinct knowledge by which to justify his fear to the mind of another. It did not satisfy him that Esther should marry Harold Transome.

"My children," said Mr Lyon at this moment,

not looking round, but only looking close at his watch, "we have just two minutes more." Then he went on writing.

Esther did not speak, but Felix could not help observing now that her hands had turned to a deathly coldness, and that she was trembling. He believed, he knew, that whatever prospects she had, this feeling was for his sake. An overpowering impulse from mingled love, gratitude, and anxiety, urged him to say—

"I had a horrible struggle, Esther. But you see I was right. There was a fitting lot in reserve for you. But remember you have cost a great price—don't throw what is precious away. I shall want the news that you have a happiness worthy of you."

Esther felt too miserable for tears to come. She looked helplessly at Felix for a moment, then took her hands from his, and, turning away mutely, walked dreamily towards her father, and said, "Father, I am ready—there is no more to say."

She turned back again, towards the chair where her bonnet lay, with a face quite corpse-like above her dark garment.

"Esther!"

She heard Felix say the word, with an en-

treating cry, and went towards him with the swift movement of a frightened child towards its protector. He clasped her, and they kissed each other.

She never could recall anything else that happened, till she was in the carriage again with Mrs Transome.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Why, there are maidens of heroic touch,
And yet they seem like things of gossamer
You'd pinch the life out of, as out of moths.
O, it is not loud tones and mouthingness,
'Tis not the arms akimbo and large strides,
That make a woman's force. The tiniest birds,
With softest downy breasts, have passions in them
And are brave with love.

ESTHER was so placed in the Court, under Mrs Transome's wing, as to see and hear everything without effort. Harold had received them at the hotel, and had observed that Esther looked ill, and was unusually abstracted in her manner, but this seemed to be sufficiently accounted for by her sympathetic anxiety about the result of a trial in which the prisoner at the bar was a friend, and in which both her father and himself were important witnesses. Mrs Transome had no reluctance to keep a small secret from her son, and no betrayal was made of that previous "engagement" of Esther's with her father. Harold was particularly delicate and unobtrusive in

his attentions to-day: he had the consciousness that he was going to behave in a way that would gratify Esther and win her admiration, and we are all of us made more graceful by the inward presence of what we believe to be a generous purpose; our actions move to a hidden music—"a melody that's sweetly pitched in tune."

If Esther had been less absorbed by supreme feelings, she would have been aware that she was an object of special notice. In the bare squareness of a public hall, where there was not one jutting angle to hang a guess or a thought upon, not an image or a bit of colour to stir the fancy, and where the only objects of speculation, of admiration, or of any interest whatever, were human beings, and especially the human beings that occupied positions indicating some importance, the notice bestowed on Esther would not have been surprising, even if it had been merely a tribute to her youthful charm, which was well companioned by Mrs Transome's elderly majesty. But it was due also to whisperings that she was an hereditary claimant of the Transome estates, whom Harold Transome was about to marry. Harold himself had of late not cared to conceal either the fact or the probability: they both tended rather to his honour than his dishonour.

And to-day, when there was a good proportion of Trebians present, the whisperings spread rapidly.

The Court was still more crowded than on the previous day, when our poor acquaintance Dredge and his two collier companions were sentenced to a year's imprisonment with hard labour, and the more enlightened prisoner, who stole the Debarrys' plate, to transportation for life. Poor Dredge had cried, had wished he'd "never heared of a 'lection," and in spite of sermons from the jail chaplain, fell back on the explanation that this was a world in which Spratt and Old Nick were sure to get the best of it; so that in Dredge's case, at least, most observers must have had the melancholy conviction that there had been no enhancement of public spirit and faith in progress from that wave of political agitation which had reached the Sproxton Pits.

But curiosity was necessarily at a higher pitch to-day, when the character of the prisoner and the circumstances of his offence were of a highly unusual kind. As soon as Felix appeared at the bar, a murmur rose and spread into a loud buzz, which continued until there had been repeated authoritative calls for silence in the Court. Rather singularly, it was now for the first time that Esther had a feeling of pride in him on the ground simply of

his appearance. At this moment, when he was the centre of a multitudinous gaze, which seemed to act on her own vision like a broad unmitigated daylight, she felt that there was something pre-eminent in him, notwithstanding the vicinity of numerous gentlemen. No apple-woman would have admired him ; not only to feminine minds like Mrs Tiliot's, but to many minds in coat and waistcoat, there was something dangerous and perhaps unprincipled in his bare throat and great Gothic head; and his somewhat massive person would doubtless have come out very oddly from the hands of a fashionable tailor of that time. But as Esther saw his large grey eyes looking round calmly and undefiantly, first at the audience generally, and then with a more observant expression at the lawyers and other persons immediately around him, she felt that he bore the outward stamp of a distinguished nature. Forgive her if she needed this satisfaction: all of us—whether men or women —are liable to this weakness of liking to have our preference justified before others as well as ourselves. Esther said inwardly, with a certain triumph, that Felix Holt looked as worthy to be chosen in the midst of this large assembly, as he had ever looked in their *tête-à-tête* under the sombre light of the little parlour in Malthouse Yard.

Esther had felt some relief in hearing from her father that Felix had insisted on doing without his mother's presence; and since to Mrs Holt's imagination, notwithstanding her general desire to have her character inquired into, there was no greatly consolatory difference between being a witness and a criminal, and an appearance of any kind "before the judge" could hardly be made to suggest anything definite that would overcome the dim sense of unalleviated disgrace, she had been less inclined than usual to complain of her son's decision. Esther had shuddered beforehand at the inevitable farce there would be in Mrs Holt's testimony. But surely Felix would lose something for want of a witness who could testify to his behaviour in the morning before he became involved in the tumult?

"He is really a fine young fellow," said Harold, coming to speak to Esther after a colloquy with the prisoner's solicitor. "I hope he will not make a blunder in defending himself."

"He is not likely to make a blunder," said Esther. She had recovered her colour a little, and was brighter than she had been all the morning before.

Felix had seemed to include her in his general glance, but had avoided looking at her particularly.

She understood how delicate feeling for her would prevent this, and that she might safely look at him, and towards her father, whom she could see in the same direction. Turning to Harold to make an observation, she saw that he was looking towards the same point, but with an expression on his face that surprised her.

"Dear me," she said, prompted to speak without any reflection; "how angry you look! I never saw you look so angry before. It is not my father you are looking at?"

"Oh no! I am angry at something I'm looking away from," said Harold, making an effort to drive back the troublesome demon who would stare out at window. "It's that Jermyn," he added, glancing at his mother as well as Esther. "He will thrust himself under my eyes everywhere since I refused him an interview and returned his letter. I'm determined never to speak to him directly again, if I can help it."

Mrs Transome heard with a changeless face. She had for some time been watching, and had taken on her marble look of immobility. She said an inward bitter "Of course!" to everything that was unpleasant.

After this Esther soon became impatient of all

speech: her attention was riveted on the proceedings of the Court, and on the mode in which Felix bore himself. In the case for the prosecution there was nothing more than a reproduction, with irrelevancies added by witnesses, of the facts already known to us. Spratt had retained consciousness enough, in the midst of his terror, to swear that, when he was tied to the finger-post, Felix was presiding over the actions of the mob. The landlady of the Seven Stars, who was indebted to Felix for rescue from pursuit by some drunken rioters, gave evidence that went to prove his assumption of leadership prior to the assault on Spratt,—remembering only that he had called away her pursuers to "better sport." Various respectable witnesses swore to Felix's "encouragement" of the rioters who were dragging Spratt in King Street; to his fatal assault on Tucker; and to his attitude in front of the drawing-room window at the Manor.

Three other witnesses gave evidence of expressions used by the prisoner, tending to show the character of the acts with which he was charged. Two were Treby tradesmen, the third was a clerk from Duffield. The clerk had heard Felix speak at Duffield; the Treby men had frequently heard him declare himself on public matters; and they all

quoted expressions which tended to show that he had a virulent feeling against the respectable shop-keeping class, and that nothing was likely to be more congenial to him than the gutting of retailers' shops. No one else knew—the witnesses themselves did not know fully—how far their strong perception and memory on these points was due to a fourth mind, namely, that of Mr John Johnson, the attorney, who was nearly related to one of the Treby witnesses, and a familiar acquaintance of the Duffield clerk. Man cannot be defined as an evidence-giving animal; and in the difficulty of getting up evidence on any subject, there is room for much unrecognised action of diligent persons who have the extra stimulus of some private motive. Mr Johnson was present in court to-day, but in a modest, retired situation. He had come down to give information to Mr Jermyn, and to gather information in other quarters, which was well illuminated by the appearance of Esther in company with the Transomes.

When the case for the prosecution closed, all strangers thought that it looked very black for the prisoner. In two instances only Felix had chosen to put a cross-examining question. The first was to ask Spratt if he did not believe that his having been tied to the post had saved him from a probably

mortal injury? The second was to ask the tradesman who swore to his having heard Felix tell the rioters to leave Tucker alone and come along with him, whether he had not, shortly before, heard cries among the mob summoning to an attack on the wine-vaults and brewery.

Esther had hitherto listened closely but calmly. She knew that there would be this strong adverse testimony; and all her hopes and fears were bent on what was to come beyond it. It was when the prisoner was asked what he had to adduce in reply that she felt herself in the grasp of that tremor which does not disable the mind, but rather gives keener consciousness of a mind having a penalty of body attached to it.

There was a silence as of night when Felix Holt began to speak. His voice was firm and clear: he spoke with simple gravity, and evidently without any enjoyment of the occasion. Esther had never seen his face look so weary.

"My Lord, I am not going to occupy the time of the Court with unnecessary words. I believe the witnesses for the prosecution have spoken the truth as far as a superficial observation would enable them to do it; and I see nothing that can weigh with the jury in my favour, unless they believe my

statement of my own motives, and the testimony that certain witnesses will give to my character and purposes as being inconsistent with my willingly abetting disorder. I will tell the Court in as few words as I can, how I got entangled in the mob, how I came to attack the constable, and how I was led to take a course which seems rather mad to myself, now I look back upon it."

Felix then gave a concise narrative of his motives and conduct on the day of the riot, from the moment when he was startled into quitting his work by the earlier uproar of the morning. He omitted, of course, his visit to Malthouse Yard, and merely said that he went out to walk again after returning to quiet his mother's mind. He got warmed by the story of his experience, which moved him more strongly than ever, now he recalled it in vibrating words before a large audience of his fellow-men. The sublime delight of truthful speech to one who has the great gift of uttering it, will make itself felt even through the pangs of sorrow.

"That is all I have to say for myself, my Lord. I pleaded 'Not guilty' to the charge of Manslaughter, because I know that word may carry a meaning which would not fairly apply to my act. When I threw Tucker down, I did not see the possibility

that he would die from a sort of attack which ordinarily occurs in fighting without any fatal effect. As to my assaulting a constable, it was a quick choice between two evils: I should else have been disabled. And he attacked me under a mistake about my intentions. I'm not prepared to say I never would assault a constable where I had more chance of deliberation. I certainly should assault him if I saw him doing anything that made my blood boil: I reverence the law, but not where it is a pretext for wrong, which it should be the very object of law to hinder. I consider that I should be making an unworthy defence, if I let the Court infer from what I say myself, or from what is said by my witnesses, that because I am a man who hate drunken motiveless disorder, or any wanton harm, therefore I am a man who would never fight against authority. I hold it blasphemy to say that a man ought not to fight against authority: there is no great religion and no great freedom that has not done it, in the beginning. It would be impertinent for me to speak of this now, if I did not need to say in my own defence, that I should hold myself the worst sort of traitor if I put my hand either to fighting or disorder—which must mean injury to somebody—if I were not urged to it by what I hold to be sacred

feelings, making a sacred duty either to my own manhood or to my fellow-man. And certainly," Felix ended with a strong ring of scorn in his voice, "I never held it a sacred duty to try and get a Radical candidate returned for North Loamshire, by willingly heading a drunken howling mob, whose public action must consist in breaking windows, destroying hard-got produce, and endangering the lives of men and women. I have no more to say, my Lord."

"I foresaw he would make a blunder," said Harold, in a low voice to Esther. Then, seeing her shrink a little, he feared she might suspect him of being merely stung by the allusion to himself. "I don't mean what he said about the Radical candidate," he added hastily, in correction. "I don't mean the last sentence. I mean that whole peroration of his, which he ought to have left unsaid. It has done him harm with the jury—they won't understand it, or rather will misunderstand it. And I'll answer for it, it has soured the judge. It remains to be seen what we witnesses can say for him, to nullify the effect of what he has said for himself. I hope the attorney has done his best in collecting the evidence: I understand the expense of the witnesses is undertaken by some

Liberals at Glasgow and in Lancashire, friends of Holt's. But I suppose your father has told you."

The first witness called for the defence was Mr Lyon. The gist of his statements was, that from the beginning of September last until the day of election he was in very frequent intercourse with the prisoner; that he had become intimately acquainted with his character and views of life, and his conduct with respect to the election, and that these were totally inconsistent with any other supposition than that his being involved in the riot, and his fatal encounter with the constable, were due to the calamitous failure of a bold but good purpose. He stated further that he had been present when an interview had occurred in his own house between the prisoner and Mr Harold Transome, who was then canvassing for the representation of North Loamshire. That the object of the prisoner in seeking this interview had been to inform Mr Transome of treating given in his name to the workmen in the pits and on the canal at Sproxton, and to remonstrate against its continuance; the prisoner fearing that disturbance and mischief might result from what he believed to be the end towards which this treating was directed—namely, the presence of these men on the occasions of the

nomination and polling. Several times after this interview, Mr Lyon said, he had heard Felix Holt recur to the subject therein discussed with expressions of grief and anxiety. He himself was in the habit of visiting Sproxton in his ministerial capacity: he knew fully what the prisoner had done there in order to found a night-school, and was certain that the prisoner's interest in the working men of that district turned entirely on the possibility of converting them somewhat to habits of soberness and to a due care for the instruction of their children. Finally, he stated that the prisoner, in compliance with his request, had been present at Duffield on the day of the nomination, and had on his return expressed himself with strong indignation concerning the employment of the Sproxton men on that occasion, and what he called the wickedness of hiring blind violence.

The quaint appearance and manner of the little Dissenting minister could not fail to stimulate the peculiar wit of the bar. He was subjected to a troublesome cross-examination, which he bore with wide-eyed shortsighted quietude and absorption in the duty of truthful response. On being asked, rather sneeringly, if the prisoner was not one of his flock? he answered, in that deeper tone which

made one of the most effective transitions of his varying voice,

"Nay—would to God he were! I should then feel that the great virtues and the pure life I have beheld in him were a witness to the efficacy of the faith I believe in and the discipline of the Church whereunto I belong."

Perhaps it required a larger power of comparison than was possessed by any of that audience to appreciate the moral elevation of an Independent minister who could utter those words. Nevertheless there was a murmur, which was clearly one of sympathy.

The next witness, and the one on whom the interest of the spectators was chiefly concentrated, was Harold Transome. There was a decided predominance of Tory feeling in the Court, and the human disposition to enjoy the infliction of a little punishment on an opposite party, was, in this instance, of a Tory complexion. Harold was keenly alive to this, and to everything else that might prove disagreeable to him in his having to appear in the witness-box. But he was not likely to lose his self-possession, or to fail in adjusting himself gracefully, under conditions which most men would find it difficult to carry without awkwardness. He

had generosity and candour enough to bear Felix Holt's proud rejection of his advances without any petty resentment; he had all the susceptibilities of a gentleman; and these moral qualities gave the right direction to his acumen, in judging of the behaviour that would best secure his dignity. Everything requiring self-command was easier to him because of Esther's presence; for her admiration was just then the object which this well-tanned man of the world had it most at heart to secure.

When he entered the witness-box he was much admired by the ladies amongst the audience, many of whom sighed a little at the thought of his wrong course in politics. He certainly looked like a handsome portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence, in which that remarkable artist had happily omitted the usual excess of honeyed blandness mixed with alert intelligence, which is hardly compatible with the state of man out of paradise. He stood not far off Felix; and the two Radicals certainly made a striking contrast. Felix might have come from the hands of a sculptor in the later Roman period, when the plastic impulse was stirred by the grandeur of barbaric forms—when rolled collars were not yet conceived, and satin stocks were not.

Harold Transome declared that he had had only

one interview with the prisoner: it was the interview referred to by the previous witness, in whose presence and in whose house it was begun. The interview, however, was continued beyond the observation of Mr Lyon. The prisoner and himself quitted the Dissenting minister's house in Malthouse Yard together, and proceeded to the office of Mr Jermyn, who was then conducting electioneering business on his behalf. His object was to comply with Holt's remonstrance by inquiring into the alleged proceedings at Sproxton, and, if possible, to put a stop to them. Holt's language, both in Malthouse Yard and in the attorney's office, was strong: he was evidently indignant, and his indignation turned on the danger of employing ignorant men excited by drink on an occasion of popular concourse. He believed that Holt's sole motive was the prevention of disorder, and what he considered the demoralisation of the workmen by treating. The event had certainly justified his remonstrances. He had not had any subsequent opportunities of observing the prisoner; but if any reliance was to be placed on a rational conclusion, it must, he thought, be plain that the anxiety thus manifested by Holt was a guarantee of the statement he had made as to his motives on the day of the riot. His entire impres-

sion from Holt's manner in that single interview was, that he was a moral and political enthusiast, who, if he sought to coerce others, would seek to coerce them into a difficult, and perhaps impracticable, scrupulosity.

Harold spoke with as noticeable a directness and emphasis, as if what he said could have no reaction on himself. He had of course not entered unnecessarily into what occurred in Jermyn's office. But now he was subjected to a cross-examination on this subject, which gave rise to some subdued shrugs, smiles, and winks, among county gentlemen.

The questions were directed so as to bring out, if possible, some indication that Felix Holt was moved to his remonstrance by personal resentment against the political agents concerned in setting on foot the treating at Sproxton, but such questioning is a sort of target-shooting that sometimes hits about widely. The cross-examining counsel had close connections among the Tories of Loamshire, and enjoyed his business to-day. Under the fire of various questions about Jermyn and the agent employed by him at Sproxton, Harold got warm, and in one of his replies said, with his rapid sharpness,

"Mr Jermyn was my agent then, not now: I

have no longer any but hostile relations with him."

The sense that he had shown a slight heat would have vexed Harold more if he had not got some satisfaction out of the thought that Jermyn heard those words. He recovered his good temper quickly, and when, subsequently, the question came,

"You acquiesced in the treating of the Sproxton men, as necessary to the efficient working of the reformed constituency?" Harold replied, with quiet fluency,

"Yes; on my return to England, before I put up for North Loamshire, I got the best advice from practised agents, both Whig and Tory. They all agreed as to electioneering measures."

The next witness was Michael Brincey, otherwise Mike Brindle, who gave evidence of the sayings and doings of the prisoner amongst the Sproxton men. Mike declared that Felix went "uncommon again' drink, and pitch-and-toss, and quarrelling, and sich," and was "all for schooling and bringing up the little chaps;" but on being cross-examined, he admitted that he "couldn't give much account;" that Felix did talk again' idle folks, whether poor or rich, and that most like he meant the rich, who had "a rights to be idle," which was

what he, Mike, liked himself sometimes, though for the most part he was "a hard-working butty." On being checked for this superfluous allegation of his own theory and practice, Mike became timidly conscious that answering was a great mystery beyond the reaches of a butty's soul, and began to err from defect instead of excess. However, he reasserted that what Felix most wanted was, "to get 'em to set up a school for the little chaps."

With the two succeeding witnesses, who swore to the fact that Felix had tried to lead the mob along Hobb's Lane instead of towards the Manor, and to the violently threatening character of Tucker's attack on him, the case for the defence was understood to close.

Meanwhile Esther had been looking on and listening with growing misery, in the sense that all had not been said which might have been said on behalf of Felix. If it was the jury who were to be acted on, she argued to herself, there might have been an impression made on their feeling which would determine their verdict. Was it not constantly said and seen that juries pronounced Guilty or Not Guilty from sympathy for or against the accused? She was too inexperienced to check her own argument by thoroughly representing to herself the

course of things: how the counsel for the prosecution would reply, and how the judge would sum up, with the object of cooling down sympathy into deliberation. What she had painfully pressing on her inward vision was, that the trial was coming to an end, and that the voice of right and truth had not been strong enough.

When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardour of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes one of her most precious influences: she is the added impulse that shatters the stiffening crust of cautious experience. Her inspired ignorance gives a sublimity to actions so incongruously simple, that otherwise they would make men smile. Some of that ardour which has flashed out and illuminated all poetry and history was burning to-day in the bosom of sweet Esther Lyon. In this, at least, her woman's lot was perfect: that the man she loved was her hero; that her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current. And to-day they were making one danger, one terror, one irresistible impulse for her heart. Her feelings were growing into a necessity for action, rather than a resolve to act. She could not support the thought that the

trial would come to an end, that sentence would be passed on Felix, and that all the while something had been omitted which might have been said for him. There had been no witness to tell what had been his behaviour and state of mind just before the riot. She must do it. It was possible. There was time. But not too much time. All other agitation became merged in eagerness not to let the moment escape. The last witness was being called. Harold Transome had not been able to get back to her on leaving the witness-box, but Mr Lingon was close by her. With firm quickness she said to him—

"Pray tell the attorney that I have evidence to give for the prisoner—lose no time."

"Do you know what you are going to say, my dear?" said Mr Lingon, looking at her in astonishment.

"Yes—I entreat you, for God's sake," said Esther, in that low tone of urgent beseeching which is equivalent to a cry; and with a look of appeal more penetrating still, "I would rather die than not do it."

The old Rector, always leaning to the good-natured view of things, felt chiefly that there seemed to be an additional chance for the poor fellow who

had got himself into trouble. He disputed no farther, but went to the attorney.

Before Harold was aware of Esther's intention she was on her way to the witness-box. When she appeared there, it was as if a vibration, quick as light, had gone through the Court and had shaken Felix himself, who had hitherto seemed impassive. A sort of gleam seemed to shoot across his face, and any one close to him could have seen that his hand, which lay on the edge of the dock, trembled.

At the first moment Harold was startled and alarmed; the next, he felt delight in Esther's beautiful aspect, and in the admiration of the Court. There was no blush on her face: she stood, divested of all personal considerations whether of vanity or shyness. Her clear voice sounded as it might have done if she had been making a confession of faith. She began and went on without query or interruption. Every face looked grave and respectful.

"I am Esther Lyon, the daughter of Mr Lyon, the Independent minister at Treby, who has been one of the witnesses for the prisoner. I know Felix Holt well. On the day of the election at Treby, when I had been much alarmed by the noises that reached me from the main street, Felix Holt came to call upon me. He knew that my father was away,

and he thought that I should be alarmed by the sounds of disturbance. It was about the middle of the day, and he came to tell me that the disturbance was quieted, and that the streets were nearly emptied. But he said he feared that the men would collect again after drinking, and that something worse might happen later in the day. And he was in much sadness at this thought. He stayed a little while, and then he left me. He was very melancholy. His mind was full of great resolutions that came from his kind feeling towards others. It was the last thing he would have done to join in riot or to hurt any man, if he could have helped it. His nature is very noble; he is tender-hearted; he could never have had any intention that was not brave and good."

There was something so naive and beautiful in this action of Esther's, that it conquered every low or petty suggestion even in the commonest minds. The three men in that assembly who knew her best —even her father and Felix Holt—felt a thrill of surprise mingling with their admiration. This bright, delicate, beautiful-shaped thing that seemed most like a toy or ornament—some hand had touched the chords, and there came forth music that brought tears. Half a year before, Esther's dread of being

ridiculous spread over the surface of her life; but the depth below was sleeping.

Harold Transome was ready to give her his hand and lead her back to her place. When she was there, Felix, for the first time, could not help looking towards her, and their eyes met in one solemn glance.

Afterwards Esther found herself unable to listen so as to form any judgment on what she heard. The acting out of that strong impulse had exhausted her energy. There was a brief pause, filled with a murmur, a buzz, and much coughing. The audience generally felt as if dull weather was setting in again. And under those auspices the counsel for the prosecution got up to make his reply. Esther's deed had its effect beyond the momentary one, but the effect was not visible in the rigid necessities of legal procedure. The counsel's duty of restoring all unfavourable facts to due prominence in the minds of the jurors, had its effect altogether reinforced by the summing-up of the judge. Even the bare discernment of facts, much more their arrangement with a view to inferences, must carry a bias: human impartiality, whether judicial or not, can hardly escape being more or less loaded. It was not that the judge had severe intentions; it was only that he

saw with severity. The conduct of Felix was not such as inclined him to indulgent consideration, and, in his directions to the jury, that mental attitude necessarily told on the light in which he placed the homicide. Even to many in the Court who were not constrained by judicial duty, it seemed that though this high regard felt for the prisoner by his friends, and especially by a generous-hearted woman, was very pretty, such conduct as his was not the less dangerous and foolish, and assaulting and killing a constable was not the less an offence to be regarded without leniency.

Esther seemed now so tremulous, and looked so ill, that Harold begged her to leave the Court with his mother and Mr Lingon. He would come and tell her the issue. But she said, quietly, that she would rather stay; she was only a little overcome by the exertion of speaking. She was inwardly resolved to see Felix to the last moment before he left the Court.

Though she could not follow the address of the counsel or the judge, she had a keen ear for what was brief and decisive. She heard the verdict, "Guilty of manslaughter." And every word uttered by the judge in pronouncing sentence fell upon her like an unforgetable sound that would come

back in dreaming and in waking. She had her eyes on Felix, and at the words, "Imprisonment for four years," she saw his lip tremble. But otherwise he stood firm and calm.

Esther gave a start from her seat. Her heart swelled with a horrible sensation of pain; but, alarmed lest she should lose her self-command, she grasped Mrs Transome's hand, getting some strength from that human contact.

Esther saw that Felix had turned. She could no longer see his face. "Yes," she said, drawing down her veil, "let us go."

CHAPTER XLVII.

The devil tempts us not—'tis we tempt him,
Beckoning his skill with opportunity.

THE more permanent effect of Esther's action in the trial was visible in a meeting which took place the next day in the principal room of the White Hart at Loamford. To the magistrates and other county gentlemen who were drawn together about noon, some of the necessary impulse might have been lacking but for that stirring of heart in certain just-spirited men and good fathers among them, which had been raised to a high pitch of emotion by Esther's maidenly fervour. Among these one of the foremost was Sir Maximus Debarry, who had come to the assizes with a mind, as usual, slightly rebellious under an influence which he never ultimately resisted—the influence of his son. Philip Debarry himself was detained in London, but in his correspondence with his father he had urged him, as well as his uncle

Augustus, to keep eyes and interest awake on the subject of Felix Holt, whom, from all the knowledge of the case he had been able to obtain, he was inclined to believe peculiarly unfortunate rather than guilty. Philip had said he was the more anxious that his family should intervene benevolently in this affair, if it were possible, because he understood that Mr Lyon took the young man's case particularly to heart, and he should always regard himself as obliged to the old preacher. At this superfineness of consideration Sir Maximus had vented a few "pshaws!" and, in relation to the whole affair, had grumbled that Phil was always setting him to do he didn't know what—always seeming to turn nothing into something by dint of words which hadn't so much substance as a mote behind them. Nevertheless he was coerced; and in reality he was willing to do anything fair or good-natured which had a handle that his understanding could lay hold of. His brother, the Rector, desired to be rigorously just; but he had come to Loamford with a severe opinion concerning Felix, thinking that some sharp punishment might be a wholesome check on the career of a young man disposed to rely too much on his own crude devices.

Before the trial commenced, Sir Maximus had

naturally been one of those who had observed Esther with curiosity, owing to the report of her inheritance, and her probable marriage to his once welcome but now exasperating neighbour, Harold Transome; and he had made the emphatic comment — "A fine girl! something thoroughbred in the look of her. Too good for a Radical; that's all I have to say." But during the trial Sir Maximus was wrought into a state of sympathetic ardour that needed no fanning. As soon as he could take his brother by the buttonhole, he said,

"I tell you what, Gus! we must exert ourselves to get a pardon for this young fellow. Confound it! what's the use of mewing him up for four years? Example? Nonsense. Will there be a man knocked down the less for it? That girl made me cry. Depend upon it, whether she's going to marry Transome or not, she's been fond of Holt—in her poverty, you know. She's a modest, brave, beautiful woman. I'd ride a steeplechase, old as I am, to gratify her feelings. Hang it! the fellow's a good fellow if she thinks so. And he threw out a fine sneer, I thought, at the Radical candidate. Depend upon it, he's a good fellow at bottom."

The Rector had not exactly the same kind of ardour, nor was he open to precisely that process of

proof which appeared to have convinced Sir Maximus; but he had been so far influenced as to be inclined to unite in an effort on the side of mercy, observing, also, that he "knew Phil would be on that side." And by the co-operation of similar movements in the minds of other men whose names were of weight, a meeting had been determined on to consult about getting up a memorial to the Home Secretary on behalf of Felix Holt. His case had never had the sort of significance that could rouse political partisanship; and such interest as was now felt in him was still more unmixed with that inducement. The gentlemen who gathered in the room at the White Hart were—not as the large imagination of the *North Loamshire Herald* suggested, "of all shades of political opinion," but—of as many shades as were to be found among the gentlemen of that county.

Harold Transome had been energetically active in bringing about this meeting. Over and above the stings of conscience and a determination to act up to the level of all recognised honourableness, he had the powerful motive of desiring to do what would satisfy Esther. His gradually heightened perception that she had a strong feeling towards Felix Holt had not made him uneasy. Harold had

a conviction that might have seemed like fatuity if it had not been that he saw the effect he produced on Esther by the light of his opinions about women in general. The conviction was, that Felix Holt could not be his rival in any formidable sense: Esther's admiration for this eccentric young man was, he thought, a moral enthusiasm, a romantic fervour, which was one among those many attractions quite novel in his own experience; her distress about the trouble of one who had been a familiar object in her former home, was no more than naturally followed from a tender woman's compassion. The place young Holt had held in her regard had necessarily changed its relations now that her lot was so widely changed. It is undeniable, that what most conduced to the quieting nature of Harold's conclusions was the influence on his imagination of the more or less detailed reasons that Felix Holt was a watchmaker, that his home and dress were of a certain quality, that his person and manners—that, in short (for Harold, like the rest of us, had many impressions which saved him the trouble of distinct ideas), Felix Holt was not the sort of man a woman would be likely to be in love with when she was wooed by Harold Transome.

Thus, he was sufficiently at rest on this point not to be exercising any painful self-conquest in acting as the zealous advocate of Felix Holt's cause with all persons worth influencing; but it was by no direct intercourse between him and Sir Maximus that they found themselves in co-operation, for the old baronet would not recognise Harold by more than the faintest bow, and Harold was not a man to expose himself to a rebuff. Whatever he in his inmost soul regarded as nothing more than a narrow prejudice, he could defy, not with airs of importance, but with easy indifference. He could bear most things good-humouredly where he felt that he had the superiority. The object of the meeting was discussed, and the memorial agreed upon without any clashing. Mr Lingon was gone home, but it was expected that his concurrence and signature would be given, as well as those of other gentlemen who were absent. The business gradually reached that stage at which the concentration of interest ceases—when the attention of all but a few who are more practically concerned drops off and disperses itself in private chat, and there is no longer any particular reason why everybody stays except that everybody is there. The room was rather a long one, and invited to a little movement:

one gentleman drew another aside to speak in an under-tone about Scotch bullocks, another had something to say about the North Loamshire Hunt to a friend who was the reverse of good-looking, but who, nevertheless, while listening, showed his strength of mind by giving a severe attention also to his full-length reflection in the handsome tall mirror that filled the space between two windows. And in this way the groups were continually shifting.

But in the mean time there were moving towards this room at the White Hart the footsteps of a person whose presence had not been invited, and who, very far from being drawn thither by the belief that he would be welcome, knew well that his entrance would, to one person at least, be bitterly disagreeable. They were the footsteps of Mr Jermyn, whose appearance that morning was not less comely and less carefully tended than usual, but who was suffering the torment of a compressed rage, which, if not impotent to inflict pain on another, was impotent to avert evil from himself. After his interview with Mrs Transome there had been for some reasons a delay of positive procedures against him by Harold, of which delay Jermyn had twice availed himself; first, to seek an interview with

Harold, and then to send him a letter. The interview had been refused; and the letter had been returned, with the statement that no communication could take place except through Harold's lawyers. And yesterday Johnson had brought Jermyn the information that he would quickly hear of the proceedings in Chancery being resumed: the watch Johnson kept in town had given him secure knowledge on this head. A doomed animal, with every issue earthed up except that where its enemy stands, must, if it has teeth and fierceness, try its one chance without delay. And a man may reach a point in his life in which his impulses are not distinguished from those of a hunted brute by any capability of scruples. Our selfishness is so robust and many-clutching, that, well encouraged, it easily devours all sustenance away from our poor little scruples.

Since Harold would not give Jermyn access to him, that vigorous attorney was resolved to take it. He knew all about the meeting at the White Hart, and he was going thither with the determination of accosting Harold. He thought he knew what he should say, and the tone in which he should say it. It would be a vague intimation, carrying the effect of a threat, which should compel Harold to give

him a private interview. To any counter-consideration that presented itself in his mind—to anything that an imagined voice might say—the imagined answer arose, "That's all very fine, but I'm not going to be ruined if I can help it—least of all, ruined in that way." Shall we call it degeneration or gradual development—this effect of thirty additional winters on the soft-glancing, versifying young Jermyn?

When Jermyn entered the room at the White Hart he did not immediately see Harold. The door was at the extremity of the room, and the view was obstructed by groups of gentlemen with figures broadened by overcoats. His entrance excited no peculiar observation: several persons had come in late. Only one or two, who knew Jermyn well, were not too much preoccupied to have a glancing remembrance of what had been chatted about freely the day before—Harold's irritated reply about his agent, from the witness-box. Receiving and giving a slight nod here and there, Jermyn pushed his way, looking round keenly, until he saw Harold standing near the other end of the room. The solicitor who had acted for Felix was just then speaking to him, but having put a paper into his hand turned away; and Harold, standing isolated, though at no great distance

from others, bent his eyes on the paper. He looked brilliant that morning; his blood was flowing prosperously. He had come in after a ride, and was additionally brightened by rapid talk and the excitement of seeking to impress himself favourably, or at least powerfully, on the minds of neighbours nearer or more remote. He had just that amount of flush which indicates that life is more enjoyable than usual; and as he stood with his left hand caressing his whisker, and his right holding the paper and his riding-whip, his dark eyes running rapidly along the written lines, and his lips reposing in a curve of good-humour which had more happiness in it than a smile, all beholders might have seen that his mind was at ease.

Jermyn walked quickly and quietly close up to him. The two men were of the same height, and before Harold looked round Jermyn's voice was saying, close to his ear, not in a whisper, but in a hard, incisive, disrespectful and yet not loud tone,

"Mr Transome, I must speak to you in private."

The sound jarred through Harold with a sensation all the more insufferable because of the revulsion from the satisfied, almost elated, state in which it had seized him. He started and looked round into Jermyn's eyes. For an instant, which seemed long,

there was no sound between them, but only angry hatred gathering in the two faces. Harold felt himself going to crush this insolence: Jermyn felt that he had words within him that were fangs to clutch this obstinate strength, and wring forth the blood and compel submission. And Jermyn's impulse was the more urgent. He said, in a tone that was rather lower, but yet harder and more biting,

"You will repent else—for your mother's sake."

At that sound, quick as a leaping flame, Harold had struck Jermyn across the face with his whip. The brim of the hat had been a defence. Jermyn, a powerful man, had instantly thrust out his hand and clutched Harold hard by the clothes just below the throat, pushing him slightly so as to make him stagger.

By this time everybody's attention had been called to this end of the room, but both Jermyn and Harold were beyond being arrested by any consciousness of spectators.

"Let me go, you scoundrel!" said Harold, fiercely, "or I'll be the death of you."

"Do," said Jermyn, in a grating voice; "*I am your father.*"

In the thrust by which Harold had been made to stagger backward a little, the two men had got very

near the long mirror. They were both white; both had anger and hatred in their faces; the hands of both were upraised. As Harold heard the last terrible words he started at a leaping throb that went through him, and in the start turned his eyes away from Jermyn's face. He turned them on the same face in the glass with his own beside it, and saw the hated fatherhood reasserted.

The young strong man reeled with a sick faintness. But in the same moment Jermyn released his hold, and Harold felt himself supported by the arm. It was Sir Maximus Debarry who had taken hold of him.

"Leave the room, sir!" the Baronet said to Jermyn, in a voice of imperious scorn. "This is a meeting of gentlemen."

"Come, Harold," he said, in the old friendly voice, "come away with me."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

'Tis law as stedfast as the throne of Zeus—
Our days are heritors of days gone by.
ÆSCHYLUS: *Agamemnon.*

A LITTLE after five o'clock that day, Harold arrived at Transome Court. As he was winding along the broad road of the park, some parting gleams of the March sun pierced the trees here and there, and threw on the grass a long shadow of himself and the groom riding, and illuminated a window or two of the home he was approaching. But the bitterness in his mind made these sunny gleams almost as odious as an artificial smile. He wished he had never come back to this pale English sunshine.

In the course of his eighteen miles' drive, he had made up his mind what he would do. He understood now, as he had never understood before, the neglected solitariness of his mother's life, the allu-

sions and innuendoes which had come out during the election. But with a proud insurrection against the hardship of an ignominy which was not of his own making, he inwardly said, that if the circumstances of his birth were such as to warrant any man in regarding his character of gentleman with ready suspicion, that character should be the more strongly asserted in his conduct. No one should be able to allege with any show of proof that he had inherited meanness.

As he stepped from the carriage and entered the hall, there were the voice and the trotting feet of little Harry as usual, and the rush to clasp his father's leg and make his joyful puppy-like noises. Harold just touched the boy's head, and then said to Dominic in a weary voice,

"Take the child away. Ask where my mother is."

Mrs Transome, Dominic said, was up-stairs. He had seen her go up after coming in from her walk with Miss Lyon, and she had not come down again.

Harold, throwing off his hat and greatcoat, went straight to his mother's dressing-room. There was still a hope in his mind. He might be suffering simply from a lie. There is much misery created in the world by mere mistake or slander, and he

might have been stunned by a lie suggested by such slander. He rapped at his mother's door.

Her voice said immediately, "Come in."

Mrs Transome was resting in her easy-chair, as she often did between an afternoon walk and dinner. She had taken off her walking-dress and wrapped herself in a soft dressing-gown. She was neither more nor less empty of joy than usual. But when she saw Harold, a dreadful certainty took possession of her. It was as if a long-expected letter, with a black seal, had come at last.

Harold's face told her what to fear the more decisively, because she had never before seen it express a man's deep agitation. Since the time of its pouting childhood and careless youth she had seen only the confident strength and good-humoured imperiousness of maturity. The last five hours had made a change as great as illness makes. Harold looked as if he had been wrestling, and had had some terrible blow. His eyes had that sunken look which, because it is unusual, seems to intensify expression.

He looked at his mother as he entered, and her eyes followed him as he moved, till he came and stood in front of her, she looking up at him, with white lips.

"Mother," he said, speaking with a distinct slowness, in strange contrast with his habitual manner, "tell me the truth, that I may know how to act."

He paused a moment, and then said, "Who is my father?"

She was mute: her lips only trembled. Harold stood silent for a few moments, as if waiting. Then he spoke again.

"*He* has said—said it before others—that *he* is my father."

He looked still at his mother. She seemed as if age were striking her with a sudden wand—as if her trembling face were getting haggard before him. She was mute. But her eyes had not fallen; they looked up in helpless misery at her son.

Her son turned away his eyes from her, and left her. In that moment Harold felt hard: he could show no pity All the pride of his nature rebelled against his sonship.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Nay, falter not—'tis an assured good
To seek the noblest—'tis your only good
Now you have seen it; for that higher vision
Poisons all meaner choice for evermore.

THAT day Esther dined with old Mr Transome only. Harold sent word that he was engaged and had already dined, and Mrs Transome that she was feeling ill. Esther was much disappointed that any tidings Harold might have brought relating to Felix were deferred in this way; and, her anxiety making her fearful, she was haunted by the thought that if there had been anything cheering to tell, he would have found time to tell it without delay. Old Mr Transome went as usual to his sofa in the library to sleep after dinner, and Esther had to seat herself in the small drawing-room, in a well-lit solitude that was unusually dispiriting to her. Pretty as this room was, she did not like it. Mrs Transome's full-length portrait, being the only picture there, urged

itself too strongly on her attention: the youthful brilliancy it represented saddened Esther by its inevitable association with what she daily saw had come instead of it—a joyless, embittered age. The sense that Mrs Transome was unhappy, affected Esther more and more deeply as the growing familiarity which relaxed the efforts of the hostess revealed more and more the threadbare tissue of this majestic lady's life. Even the flowers and the pure sunshine and the sweet waters of Paradise would have been spoiled for a young heart, if the bowered walks had been haunted by an Eve gone grey with bitter memories of an Adam who had complained, "The woman . . . she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." And many of us know how, even in our childhood, some blank discontented face on the background of our home has marred our summer mornings. Why was it, when the birds were singing, when the fields were a garden, and when we were clasping another little hand just larger than our own, there was somebody who found it hard to smile? Esther had got far beyond that childhood to a time and circumstances when this daily presence of elderly dissatisfaction amidst such outward things as she had always thought must greatly help to satisfy, awaked, not merely vague questioning emotion, but strong deter-

mining thought. And now, in these hours since her return from Loamford, her mind was in that state of highly-wrought activity, that large discourse, in which we seem to stand aloof from our own life—weighing impartially our own temptations and the weak desires that most habitually solicit us. "I think I am getting that power Felix wished me to have: I shall soon see strong visions," she said to herself, with a melancholy smile flitting across her face, as she put out the wax lights that she might get rid of the oppressive urgency of walls and upholstery and that portrait smiling with deluded brightness, unwitting of the future.

Just then Dominic came to say that Mr Harold sent his compliments, and begged that she would grant him an interview in his study. He disliked the small drawing-room: if she would oblige him by going to the study at once, he would join her very soon. Esther went, in some wonder and anxiety. What she most feared or hoped in these moments related to Felix Holt, and it did not occur to her that Harold could have anything special to say to her that evening on other subjects.

Certainly the study was pleasanter than the small drawing-room. A quiet light shone on nothing but greenness and dark wood, and Dominic

had placed a delightful chair for her opposite to his master's, which was still empty. All the little objects of luxury around indicated Harold's habitual occupancy; and as Esther sat opposite all these things along with the empty chair which suggested the coming presence, the expectation of his beseeching homage brought with it an impatience and repugnance which she had never felt before. While these feelings were strongly upon her, the door opened and Harold appeared.

He had recovered his self-possession since his interview with his mother: he had dressed, and was perfectly calm. He had been occupied with resolute thoughts, determining to do what he knew that perfect honour demanded, let it cost him what it would. It is true he had a tacit hope behind, that it might not cost him what he prized most highly: it is true he had a glimpse even of reward; but it was not less true that he would have acted as he did without that hope or glimpse. It was the most serious moment in Harold Transome's life: for the first time the iron had entered into his soul, and he felt the hard pressure of our common lot, the yoke of that mighty resistless destiny laid upon us by the acts of other men as well as our own.

When Esther looked at him she relented, and felt ashamed of her gratuitous impatience. She saw that his mind was in some way burdened. But then immediately sprang the dread that he had to say something hopeless about Felix.

They shook hands in silence, Esther looking at him with anxious surprise. He released her hand, but it did not occur to her to sit down, and they both continued standing on the hearth.

"Don't let me alarm you," said Harold, seeing that her face gathered solemnity from his. "I suppose I carry the marks of a past agitation. It relates entirely to troubles of my own—of my own family. No one beyond is involved in them."

Esther wondered still more, and felt still more relenting.

"But," said Harold, after a slight pause, and in a voice that was weighted with new feeling, "it involves a difference in my position with regard to you; and it is on this point that I wished to speak to you at once. When a man sees what ought to be done, he had better do it forthwith. He can't answer for himself to-morrow."

While Esther continued to look at him, with eyes widened by anxious expectation, Harold turned a

little, leaned on the mantelpiece, and ceased to look at her as he spoke.

"My feelings drag me another way. I need not tell you that your regard has become very important to me—that if our mutual position had been different—that, in short, you must have seen—if it had not seemed to be a matter of worldly interest, I should have told you plainly already that I loved you, and that my happiness could be complete only if you would consent to marry me."

Esther felt her heart beginning to beat painfully. Harold's voice and words moved her so much that her own task seemed more difficult than she had before imagined. It seemed as if the silence, unbroken by anything but the clicking of the fire, had been long, before Harold turned round towards her again and said,

"But to-day I have heard something that affects my own position. I cannot tell you what it is. There is no need. It is not any culpability of my own. But I have not just the same unsullied name and fame in the eyes of the world around us, as I believed that I had when I allowed myself to entertain that wish about you. You are very young, entering on a fresh life with bright prospects—you are worthy of everything that is best. I may be

too vain in thinking it was at all necessary; but I take this precaution against myself. I shut myself out from the chance of trying, after to-day, to induce you to accept anything which others may regard as specked and stained by any obloquy, however slight."

Esther was keenly touched. With a paradoxical longing, such as often happens to us, she wished at that moment that she could have loved this man with her whole heart. The tears came into her eyes; she did not speak, but, with an angel's tenderness in her face, she laid her hand on his sleeve. Harold commanded himself strongly, and said,

"What is to be done now is, that we should proceed at once to the necessary legal measures for putting you in possession of your own, and arranging mutual claims. After that I shall probably leave England."

Esther was oppressed by an overpowering difficulty. Her sympathy with Harold at this moment was so strong, that it spread itself like a mist over all previous thought and resolve. It was impossible now to wound him afresh. With her hand still resting on his arm, she said timidly,

"Should you be urged—obliged to go—in any case?"

"Not in every case, perhaps," Harold said, with an evident movement of the blood towards his face; "at least not for long, not for always."

Esther was conscious of the gleam in his eyes. With terror at herself, she said, in difficult haste, "I can't speak. I can't say anything to-night. A great decision has to be made: I must wait—till to-morrow."

She was moving her hand from his arm, when Harold took it reverentially and raised it to his lips. She turned towards her chair, and as he released her hand she sank down on the seat with a sense that she needed that support. She did not want to go away from Harold yet. All the while there was something she needed to know, and yet she could not bring herself to ask it. She must resign herself to depend entirely on his recollection of anything beyond his own immediate trial. She sat helpless under contending sympathies, while Harold stood at some distance from her, feeling more harassed by weariness and uncertainty, now that he had fulfilled his resolve, and was no longer under the excitement of actually fulfilling it.

Esther's last words had forbidden his revival of the subject that was necessarily supreme with him. But still she sat there, and his mind, busy as to the

probabilities of her feeling, glanced over all she had done and said in the later days of their intercourse. It was this retrospect that led him to say at last,

"You will be glad to hear that we shall get a very powerfully signed memorial to the Home Secretary about young Holt. I think your speaking for him helped a great deal. You made all the men wish what you wished."

This was what Esther had been yearning to hear and dared not ask, as well from respect for Harold's absorption in his own sorrow, as from the shrinking that belongs to our dearest need. The intense relief of hearing what she longed to hear, affected her whole frame: her colour, her expression, changed as if she had been suddenly freed from some torturing constraint. But we interpret signs of emotion as we interpret other signs—often quite erroneously, unless we have the right key to what they signify. Harold did not gather that this was what Esther had waited for, or that the change in her indicated more than he had expected her to feel at this allusion to an unusual act which she had done under a strong impulse.

Besides, the introduction of a new subject after very momentous words have passed, and are still dwelling on the mind, is necessarily a sort of con-

cussion, shaking us into a new adjustment of ourselves.

It seemed natural that soon afterward Esther put out her hand and said, "Good-night."

Harold went to his bedroom on the same level with his study, thinking of the morning with an uncertainty that dipped on the side of hope. This sweet woman, for whom he felt a passion newer than any he had expected to feel, might possibly make some hard things more bearable—if she loved him. If not—well, he had acted so that he could defy any one to say he was not a gentleman.

Esther went up-stairs to her bedroom, thinking that she should not sleep that night. She set her light on a high stand, and did not touch her dress. What she desired to see with undisturbed clearness were things not present: the rest she needed was the rest of a final choice. It was difficult. On each side there was renunciation.

She drew up her blinds, liking to see the grey sky, where there were some veiled glimmerings of moonlight, and the lines of the for-ever running river, and the bending movement of the black trees. She wanted the largeness of the world to help her thought. This young creature, who trod lightly backward and forward, and leaned against the win-

dow-frame, and shook back her brown curls as she looked at something not visible, had lived hardly more than six months since she saw Felix Holt for the first time. But life is measured by the rapidity of change, the succession of influences that modify the being; and Esther had undergone something little short of an inward revolution. The revolutionary struggle, however, was not quite at an end.

There was something which she now felt profoundly to be the best thing that life could give her. But—if it was to be had at all—it was not to be had without paying a heavy price for it, such as we must pay for all that is greatly good. A supreme love, a motive that gives a sublime rhythm to a woman's life, and exalts habit into partnership with the soul's highest needs, is not to be had where and how she wills: to know that high initiation, she must often tread where it is hard to tread, and feel the chill air, and watch through darkness. It is not true that love makes all things easy: it makes us choose what is difficult. Esther's previous life had brought her into close acquaintance with many negations, and with many positive ills too, not of the acutely painful, but of the distasteful sort. What if she chose the hardship, and had to bear it alone, with no strength to lean upon—no other

better self to make a place for trust and joy? Her past experience saved her from illusions. She knew the dim life of the back street, the contact with sordid vulgarity, the lack of refinement for the senses, the summons to a daily task; and the gain that was to make that life of privation something on which she dreaded to turn her back, as if it were heaven—the presence and the love of Felix Holt—was only a quivering hope, not a certainty. It was not in her woman's nature that the hope should not spring within her and make a strong impulse. She knew that he loved her: had he not said how a woman might help a man if she were worthy? and if she proved herself worthy? But still there was the dread that after all she might find herself on the stony road alone, and faint and be weary. Even with the fulfilment of her hope, she knew that she pledged herself to meet high demands.

And on the other side there was a lot where everything seemed easy—but for the fatal absence of those feelings which, now she had once known them, it seemed nothing less than a fall and a degradation to do without. With a terrible prescience which a multitude of impressions during her stay at Transome Court had contributed to form, she saw

herself in a silken bondage that arrested all motive, and was nothing better than a well-cushioned despair. To be restless amidst ease, to be languid among all appliances for pleasure, was a possibility that seemed to haunt the rooms of this house, and wander with her under the oaks and elms of the park. And Harold Transome's love, no longer a hovering fancy with which she played, but become a serious fact, seemed to threaten her with a stifling oppression. The homage of a man may be delightful until he asks straight for love, by which a woman renders homage. Since she and Felix had kissed each other in the prison, she felt as if she had vowed herself away, as if memory lay on her lips like a seal of possession. Yet what had happened that very evening had strengthened her liking for Harold, and her care for all that regarded him: it had increased her repugnance to turning him out of anything he had expected to be his, or to snatching anything from him on the ground of an arbitrary claim. It had even made her dread, as a coming pain, the task of saying anything to him that was not a promise of the utmost comfort under this newly-disclosed trouble of his.

It was already near midnight, but with these thoughts succeeding and returning in her mind like

scenes through which she was living, Esther had a more intense wakefulness than any she had known by day. All had been stillness hitherto, except the fitful wind outside. But her ears now caught a sound within—slight, but sudden. She moved near her door, and heard the sweep of something on the matting outside. It came closer, and paused. Then it began again, and seemed to sweep away from her. Then it approached, and paused as it had done before. Esther listened, wondering. The same thing happened again and again, till she could bear it no longer. She opened her door, and in the dim light of the corridor, where the glass above seemed to make a glimmering sky, she saw Mrs Transome's tall figure pacing slowly, with her cheek upon her hand.

CHAPTER L.

The great question in life is the suffering we cause; and the utmost ingenuity of metaphysics cannot justify the man who has pierced the heart that loved him.—BENJAMIN CONSTANT.

WHEN Denner had gone up to her mistress's room to dress her for dinner, she had found her seated just as Harold had found her, only with eyelids drooping and trembling over slowly-rolling tears—nay, with a face in which every sensitive feature, every muscle, seemed to be quivering with a silent endurance of some agony.

Denner went and stood by the chair a minute without speaking, only laying her hand gently on Mrs Transome's. At last she said, beseechingly, "Pray speak, madam. What has happened?"

"The worst, Denner—the worst."

"You are ill. Let me undress you, and put you to bed."

"No, I am not ill. I am not going to die! I shall live—I shall live!"

"What may I do?"

"Go and say I shall not dine. Then you may come back, if you will."

The patient waiting-woman came back and sat by her mistress in motionless silence. Mrs Transome would not let her dress be touched, and waved away all proffers with a slight movement of her hand. Denner dared not even light a candle without being told. At last, when the evening was far gone, Mrs Transome said,

"Go down, Denner, and find out where Harold is, and come back and tell me."

"Shall I ask him to come to you, madam?"

"No; don't dare to do it, if you love me. Come back."

Denner brought word that Mr Harold was in his study, and that Miss Lyon was with him. He had not dined, but had sent later to ask Miss Lyon to go into his study.

"Light the candles and leave me."

"Mayn't I come again?"

"No. It may be that my son will come to me."

"Mayn't I sleep on the little bed in your bedroom?"

"No, good Denner; I am not ill. You can't help me."

"That's the hardest word of all, madam."

"The time will come—but not now. Kiss me. Now go."

The small quiet old woman obeyed, as she had always done. She shrank from seeming to claim an equal's share in her mistress's sorrow.

For two hours Mrs Transome's mind hung on what was hardly a hope—hardly more than the listening for a bare possibility. She began to create the sounds that her anguish craved to hear—began to imagine a footfall, and a hand upon the door. Then, checked by continual disappointment, she tried to rouse a truer consciousness by rising from her seat and walking to her window, where she saw streaks of light moving and disappearing on the grass, and the sound of bolts and closing doors. She hurried away and threw herself into her seat again, and buried her head in the deafening down of the cushions. There was no sound of comfort for her.

Then her heart cried out within her against the cruelty of this son. When he turned from her in the first moment, he had not had time to feel anything but the blow that had fallen on himself. But afterwards—was it possible that he should not be touched with a son's pity—was it possible that he should

not have been visited by some thought of the long years through which she had suffered? The memory of those years came back to her now with a protest against the cruelty that had all fallen on *her*. She started up with a new restlessness from this spirit of resistance. She was not penitent. She had borne too hard a punishment. Always the edge of calamity had fallen on *her*. Who had felt for her? She was desolate. God had no pity, else her son would not have been so hard. What dreary future was there after this dreary past? She, too, looked out into the dim night; but the black boundary of trees and the long line of the river seemed only part of the loneliness and monotony of her life.

Suddenly she saw a light on the stone balustrades of the balcony that projected in front of Esther's window, and the flash of a moving candle falling on a shrub below. Esther was still awake and up. What had Harold told her—what had passed between them? Harold was fond of this young creature, who had been always sweet and reverential to her. There was mercy in her young heart; she might be a daughter who had no impulse to punish and to strike her whom fate had stricken. On the dim loneliness before her she seemed to see Esther's gentle look; it was possible still that the

misery of this night might be broken by some comfort. The proud woman yearned for the caressing pity that must dwell in that young bosom. She opened her door gently, but when she had reached Esther's she hesitated. She had never yet in her life asked for compassion—had never thrown herself in faith on an unproffered love. And she might have gone on pacing the corridor like an uneasy spirit without a goal, if Esther's thought, leaping towards her, had not saved her from the need to ask admission.

Mrs Transome was walking towards the door when it opened. As Esther saw that image of restless misery, it blent itself by a rapid flash with all that Harold had said in the evening. She divined that the son's new trouble must be one with the mother's long sadness. But there was no waiting. In an instant Mrs Transome felt Esther's arm round her neck, and a voice saying softly,

"O why didn't you call me before?"

They turned hand in hand into the room, and sat down together on a sofa at the foot of the bed. The disordered grey hair—the haggard face—the reddened eyelids under which the tears seemed to be coming again with pain, pierced Esther to the heart. A passionate desire to soothe this suffering

woman came over her. She clung round her again, and kissed her poor quivering lips and eyelids, and laid her young cheek against the pale and haggard one. Words could not be quick or strong enough to utter her yearning. As Mrs Transome felt that soft clinging, she said,

"God has some pity on me."

"Rest on my bed," said Esther. "You are so tired. I will cover you up warmly, and then you will sleep."

"No—tell me, dear—tell me what Harold said."

"That he has had some new trouble."

"He said nothing hard about me?"

"No—nothing. He did not mention you."

"I have been an unhappy woman, dear."

"I feared it," said Esther, pressing her gently.

"Men are selfish. They are selfish and cruel. What they care for is their own pleasure and their own pride."

"Not all," said Esther, on whom these words fell with a painful jar.

"All I have ever loved," said Mrs Transome. She paused a moment or two, and then said, "For more than twenty years I have not had an hour's happiness. Harold knows it, and yet he is hard to me."

"He will not be. To-morrow he will not be. I am sure he will be good," said Esther, pleadingly. "Remember—he said to me his trouble was new—he has not had time."

"It is too hard to bear, dear," Mrs Transome said, a new sob rising as she clung fast to Esther in return. "I am old, and expect so little now—a very little thing would seem great. Why should I be punished any more?"

Esther found it difficult to speak. The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draughts of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love.

But all the more she longed to still the pain of this heart that beat against hers.

"Do let me go to your own room with you, and let me undress you, and let me tend upon you," she said, with a woman's gentle instinct. "It will be a very great thing to me. I shall seem to have a mother again. Do let me."

Mrs Transome yielded at last, and let Esther soothe her with a daughter's tendance. She was undressed and went to bed; and at last dozed fit-

fully, with frequent starts. But Esther watched by her till the chills of morning came, and then she only wrapped more warmth around her, and slept fast in the chair till Denner's movement in the room roused her. She started out of a dream in which she was telling Felix what had happened to her that night.

Mrs Transome was now in the sounder morning sleep which sometimes comes after a long night of misery. Esther beckoned Denner into the dressing-room, and said,

"It is late, Mrs Hickes. Do you think Mr Harold is out of his room?"

"Yes, a long while; he was out earlier than usual."

"Will you ask him to come up here? Say I begged you."

When Harold entered, Esther was leaning against the back of the empty chair where yesterday he had seen his mother sitting. He was in a state of wonder and suspense, and when Esther approached him and gave him her hand, he said, in a startled way,

"Good God! how ill you look! Have you been sitting up with my mother?"

"Yes. She is asleep now," said Esther. They

had merely pressed hands by way of greeting, and now stood apart looking at each other solemnly

"Has she told you anything?" said Harold.

"No—only that she is wretched. O, I think I would bear a great deal of unhappiness to save her from having any more."

A painful thrill passed through Harold, and showed itself in his face with that pale rapid flash which can never be painted. Esther pressed her hands together, and said, timidly, though it was from an urgent prompting,

"There is nothing in all this place—nothing since ever I came here—I could care for so much as that you should sit down by her now, and that she should see you when she wakes."

Then with delicate instinct, she added, just laying her hand on his sleeve, "I know you would have come. I know you meant it. But she is asleep now. Go gently before she wakes."

Harold just laid his right hand for an instant on the back of Esther's as it rested on his sleeve, and then stepped softly to his mother's bedside.

An hour afterwards, when Harold had laid his mother's pillow afresh, and sat down again by her, she said,

"If that dear thing will marry you, Harold, it will make up to you for a great deal."

But before the day closed Harold knew that this was not to be. That young presence, which had flitted like a white new-winged dove over all the saddening relics and new finery of Transome Court, could not find its home there. Harold heard from Esther's lips that she loved some one else, and that she resigned all claim to the Transome estates.

She wished to go back to her father.

CHAPTER LI.

The maiden said, I wis the londe
Is very fair to see,
But my true-love that is in bonde
Is fairer still to me.

ONE April day, when the sun shone on the lingering rain-drops, Lyddy was gone out, and Esther chose to sit in the kitchen, in the wicker chair against the white table, between the fire and the window. The kettle was singing, and the clock was ticking steadily towards four o'clock.

She was not reading, but stitching; and as her fingers moved nimbly, something played about her parted lips like a ray. Suddenly she laid down her work, pressed her hands together on her knees, and bent forward a little. The next moment there came a loud rap at the door. She started up and opened it, but kept herself hidden behind it.

"Mr Lyon at home?" said Felix, in his firm tones.

"No, sir," said Esther from behind her screen; "but Miss Lyon is, if you'll please to walk in."

"Esther!" exclaimed Felix, amazed.

They held each other by both hands, and looked into each other's faces with delight.

"You are out of prison?"

"Yes, till I do something bad again. But you?—how is it all?"

"Oh, it is," said Esther, smiling brightly as she moved towards the wicker chair, and seated herself again, "that everything is as usual: my father is gone to see the sick; Lyddy is gone in deep despondency to buy the grocery; and I am sitting here, with some vanity in me, needing to be scolded."

Felix had seated himself on a chair that happened to be near her, at the corner of the table. He looked at her still with questioning eyes—he grave, she mischievously smiling.

"Are you come back to live here then?"

"Yes."

"You are not going to be married to Harold Transome, or to be rich?"

"No." Something made Esther take up her work again, and begin to stitch. The smiles were dying into a tremor.

"Why?" said Felix, in rather a low tone, leaning his elbow on the table, and resting his head on his hand while he looked at her.

"I did not wish to marry him, or to be rich."

"You have given it all up?" said Felix, leaning forward a little, and speaking in a still lower tone.

Esther did not speak. They heard the kettle singing and the clock loudly ticking. There was no knowing how it was: Esther's work fell, their eyes met; and the next instant their arms were round each other's necks, and once more they kissed each other.

When their hands fell again, their eyes were bright with tears. Felix laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Could you share the life of a poor man, then, Esther?"

"If I thought well enough of him," she said, the smile coming again, with the pretty saucy movement of her head.

"Have you considered well what it would be?—that it will be a very bare and simple life?"

"Yes—without atta of roses."

Felix suddenly removed his hand from her shoulder, rose from his chair, and walked a step or

two; then he turned round and said, with deep gravity,

"And the people I shall live among, Esther? They have not just the same follies and vices as the rich, but they have their own forms of folly and vice; and they have not what are called the refinements of the rich to make their faults more bearable. I don't say more bearable to me—I'm not fond of those refinements; but you are."

Felix paused an instant, and then added,

"It is very serious, Esther."

"I know it is serious," said Esther, looking up at him. "Since I have been at Transome Court I have seen many things very seriously. If I had not, I should not have left what I did leave. I made a deliberate choice."

Felix stood a moment or two, dwelling on her with a face where the gravity gathered tenderness.

"And these curls?" he said, with a sort of relenting, seating himself again, and putting his hand on them.

"They cost nothing—they are natural."

"You are such a delicate creature."

"I am very healthy. Poor women, I think, are

healthier than the rich. Besides," Esther went on, with a mischievous meaning, "I think of having some wealth."

"How?" said Felix, with an anxious start. "What do you mean?"

"I think even of two pounds a-week: one needn't live up to the splendour of all that, you know; we might live as simply as you liked: there would be money to spare, and you could do wonders, and be obliged to work too, only not if sickness came. And then I think of a little income for your mother, enough for her to live as she has been used to live; and a little income for my father, to save him from being dependent when he is no longer able to preach."

Esther said all this in a playful tone, but she ended, with a grave look of appealing submission,

"I mean—if you approve. I wish to do what you think it will be right to do."

Felix put his hand on her shoulder again and reflected a little while, looking on the hearth: then he said, lifting up his eyes, with a smile at her,

"Why, I shall be able to set up a great library, and lend the books to be dog's-eared and marked with bread-crumbs."

Esther said, laughing, "You think you are to do everything. You don't know how clever I am. I mean to go on teaching a great many things."

"Teaching me?"

"Oh yes," she said, with a little toss; "I shall improve your French accent."

"You won't want me to wear a stock?" said Felix, with a defiant shake of the head.

"No; and you will not attribute stupid thoughts to me before I've uttered them."

They laughed merrily, each holding the other's arms, like girl and boy. There was the ineffable sense of youth in common.

Then Felix leaned forward, that their lips might meet again, and after that his eyes roved tenderly over her face and curls.

"I'm a rough, severe fellow, Esther. Shall you never repent?—never be inwardly reproaching me that I was not a man who could have shared your wealth? Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure!" said Esther, shaking her head; "for then I should have honoured you less. I am weak—my husband must be greater and nobler than I am."

"O, I tell you what, though!" said Felix, starting

up, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and creasing his brow playfully, "if you take me in that way I shall be forced to be a much better fellow than I ever thought of being."

"I call that retribution," said Esther, with a laugh as sweet as the morning thrush.

EPILOGUE.

Our finest hope is finest memory;
And those who love in age think youth is happy,
Because it has a life to fill with love.

THE very next May, Felix and Esther were married. Every one in those days was married at the parish church; but Mr Lyon was not satisfied without an additional private solemnity, "wherein there was no bondage to questionable forms, so that he might have a more enlarged utterance of joy and supplication."

It was a very simple wedding; but no wedding, even the gayest, ever raised so much interest and debate in Treby Magna. Even very great people, like Sir Maximus and his family, went to the church to look at this bride, who had renounced wealth, and chosen to be the wife of a man who said he would always be poor.

Some few shook their heads; could not quite believe it; and thought there was "more behind."

But the majority of honest Trebians were affected somewhat in the same way as happy-looking Mr Wace was, who observed to his wife, as they walked from under the churchyard chestnuts, "It's wonderful how things go through you—you don't know how. I feel somehow as if I believed more in everything that's good."

Mrs Holt, that day, said she felt herself to be receiving "some reward," implying that justice certainly had much more in reserve. Little Job Tudge had an entirely new suit, of which he fingered every separate brass button in a way that threatened an arithmetical mania; and Mrs Holt had out her best tea-trays and put down her carpet again, with the satisfaction of thinking that there would no more be boys coming in all weathers with dirty shoes.

For Felix and Esther did not take up their abode in Treby Magna; and after a while Mr Lyon left the town too, and joined them where they dwelt. On his resignation the church in Malthouse Yard chose a successor to him whose doctrine was rather higher.

There were other departures from Treby. Mr Jermyn's establishment was broken up, and he was understood to have gone to reside at a great distance: some said "abroad," that large home of

ruined reputations. Mr Johnson continued blond and sufficiently prosperous till he got grey and rather more prosperous. Some persons, who did not think highly of him, held that his prosperity was a fact to be kept in the background, as being dangerous to the morals of the young; judging that it was not altogether creditable to the Divine Providence that anything but virtue should be rewarded by a front and back drawing-room in Bedford Row.

As for Mr Christian, he had no more profitable secrets at his disposal. But he got his thousand pounds from Harold Transome.

The Transome family were absent for some time from Transome Court. The place was kept up and shown to visitors, but not by Denner, who was away with her mistress. After a while the family came back, and Mrs Transome died there. Sir Maximus was at her funeral, and throughout that neighbourhood there was silence about the past.

Uncle Lingon continued to watch over the shooting on the Manor and the covers until that event occurred which he had predicted as a part of Church reform sure to come. Little Treby had a new rector, but others were sorry besides the old pointers.

As to all that wide parish of Treby Magna, it has since prospered as the rest of England has prospered.

Doubtless there is more enlightenment now. Whether the farmers are all public-spirited, the shopkeepers nobly independent, the Sproxton men entirely sober and judicious, the Dissenters quite without narrowness or asperity in religion and politics, and the publicans all fit, like Gaius, to be the friends of an apostle—these things I have not heard, not having correspondence in those parts. Whether any presumption may be drawn from the fact that North Loamshire does not yet return a Radical candidate, I leave to the all-wise—I mean the newspapers.

As to the town in which Felix Holt now resides, I will keep that a secret, lest he should be troubled by any visitor having the insufferable motive of curiosity.

I will only say that Esther has never repented. Felix, however, grumbles a little that she has made his life too easy, and that, if it were not for much walking, he should be a sleek dog.

There is a young Felix, who has a great deal more science than his father, but not much more money.

THE END.

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